# *Alien Nation:*
# *David Hare's History Plays*

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A thesis
submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the Degree
of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the
University of Canterbury
by
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University of Canterbury
1989

## Abstract

This thesis will examine seven plays by David Hare, which together constitute a social history of Britain since the Second World War. Hare's main project is to demonstrate to the members of his audience, most of whom will be "middle class," that they are psychologically damaged by the capitalist-patriarchal system. The ideological fictions which have evolved to justify the existing structure of society and to discourage the oppressed from challenging that structure create psychological contradictions which cannot be resolved without radical social change. The middle classes are suffering from alienation no less than the oppressed, even though they may not be aware of it, and the loss of their privileged economic and political positions would be a small price to pay for the greater happiness which would accompany the removal of these contradictions. The history plays are therefore an attempt to create a counter-hegemony, by undermining established myths about the nature of contemporary British society.

Chapter 1 provides brief accounts of British political theatre since the 1960s and the origins of Western Marxism. It also introduces the Marxist concepts of alienation, ideology and hegemony (in particular, the theories of Antonio Gramsci and Herbert Marcuse), relating them to the oppression of women as well as the oppression of classes. Chapters 2-8 examine the plays separately in the light of these concepts, with different emphases determined by the content of the plays. Specific issues which are examined in these chapters include the loss of individuality in contemporary capitalism, and the stultifying effects of certain current myths — about the transcendent power of romantic love, the liberating force of the sexual act, the social revolution which took place during World War Two and the alleged benevolence and contentment of the 1950s. Chapter 9 provides some brief comments on political theatre in general, and realist political theatre in particular, and considers how far the intentions of the playwright may be sabotaged by theatrical conventions and the preconceptions of the audience.

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## Preface

In September 1973 the Nottingham Playhouse saw the premiere of David Hare's *Brassneck*, the first of a series of plays in which he traces the changes that have taken place in British society since the Second World War. In the following sixteen years he has written another seven: *Knuckle* (1974), *Teeth 'n' Smiles* (1975), *Licking Hitler* (1978), *Plenty* (1978), *Dreams of Leaving* (1980), *Wetherby* (1985) and *The Secret Rapture* (1988).[1] This catalogue, which constitutes roughly a third of Hare's dramatic output so far, includes five stage plays, two pieces for television and one feature film. In 1984, three of these works were published in one volume by Faber and Faber under the title of *The History Plays*. This title applies equally well to the other five, so I have adopted it for my thesis.

At first glance, it may not be obvious why Hare's works should be called "history plays." They are not set in the distant past, like Walter Scott's great historical novels. Nor do they deal with major historical occurrences, like Shakespeare's chronicles of the English kings. Hare's characters are all fictitious, and when they are involved in momentous events they are always on the periphery. *Brassneck*, and some of the others to a lesser extent, could be described as broad historical sagas spanning several generations in the Harold Robbins mould. But by no stretch of the imagination could *Knuckle* or *Teeth 'n' Smiles* be said to be sagas, so we are left with the problem, why "history plays"?

The most accurate description of Hare's project is probably *sociological* history. The focus of the plays is on the daily lives of people in the community, showing how they are affected by the larger changes going on around them:

> For five years I have been writing history plays. I try to show the English their history. I write tribal pieces, trying to show how people behaved on this island, off this continental shelf, in this century. How this Empire vanished, how these ideals died.[2]

If history is conceived as the attempt to understand how people from a particular place at a particular time thought, and why they acted as they did, then Hare's portrayal of a disintegrating rock group in the late sixties in *Teeth 'n' Smiles* deserves the name just as much as Edward Thompson's discussion of the Corresponding Societies of the 1790s in *The Making of the English Working Class*.

It could be argued, however, that I have omitted some texts which fit this definition of a history play, while including others which do not. What justification is

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1. The last of these was published too late to be incorporated in my thesis.
2. David Hare, "A Lecture Given at Kings College, Cambridge, March 5 1978," in *Licking Hitler* (London: Faber and Faber, 1978), p. 66; hereafter cited as "Lecture."

there for choosing *Teeth 'n' Smiles*, *Knuckle* and *Dreams of Leaving* ahead of *Slag* (1970), *The Great Exhibition* (1972) and *Pravda* (1986)? I have relied on my intuition in this matter, and the first three seemed to me more typical of British society in general, or at least of substantial portions of it. The others were less interesting because they were too limited in scope. In *The Great Exhibition*, for example, the section of society under consideration is very small, so that it is impossible to draw from it any interesting conclusions about society as a whole. The same is true of *Slag*, which describes an attempt to establish a feminist Utopia in a small private school, and *Pravda*, which concentrates almost solely on the corruption of the media.

Another point worth mentioning is the order in which I have arranged the chapters of this thesis. Instead of examining the plays in the order in which they were written, I have arranged them according to the chronological periods which they cover. In those which span several decades, I have used the latest period as the dominant one. So *Brassneck*, which runs from 1945 to 1973, is placed between *Teeth 'n' Smiles* (set in June 1969) and *Knuckle* (set in 1974). Since I am primarily concerned with British history and the political lessons to be learned from it, this structure seemed the most appropriate.

I have not simply imposed my own ideas on Hare's plays, as the deranged Charles Kinbote does in Nabokov's *Pale Fire*. Nevertheless, the "Hare" of my thesis *is* a textual creation, quite distinct from the *real* Hare who lives in London and directs at the National Theatre. It should be borne in mind throughout what follows that whenever I discuss "Hare's" political beliefs, his intentions, his development or his errors, I am always talking about a literary device. This thesis is openly polemical, and I believe that it is important that it should be accessible. Most readers will find reference to a personalised author easier to understand, since this is traditional critical practice, so I am quite happy to talk about an *author* even though I am really talking solely about *texts*.

Even the real Hare's own statements about his work, which I cite frequently, have no special authority. This does not mean that they are irrelevant, but an author's plans can only ever have a limited influence on the text which he or she produces, because other factors — such as what things cannot be said or even imagined in a particular society, who decides which books are published and which plays performed, and the limitations of the various genres — are equally important.[3] In any case, these interviews and lectures are also just texts, no more or less definitive than the opinions of any other critic, theorist or historian. Their purpose is to provide *clarification* rather than proof.

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3. See Terry Eagleton, "Categories for a Materialist Criticism," in *Criticism and Ideology* (London: New Left Books, 1976), pp. 44-63.

# Chapter 1
## You say you want a revolution: Historical and theoretical background

In one of the best books on the left-wing theatre movement which arose in the sixties, John Bull distinguishes two forms of committed drama.[1] On one side stands the agit-prop tradition, which was conventionally Marxist, regarding the capitalist system as the cause of all injustice in society and the working class as the natural agent of change. Groups such as CAST and 7:84, and playwrights such as John McGrath and David Edgar, thought of their productions as weapons in the class struggle, intended to raise the consciousness of the proletariat.

On the other side, there is what Bull calls the *avant-garde*, which "occupied the territory of a counter-culture intent on bypassing the discourse of orthodox political debate."[2] Initially, this was a radical movement more concerned with personal liberation than with social change. In so far as it had a political creed, it emphasised political change through *cultural* revolution. For much of the decade it assumed that as more people recognised the benefits of Timothy Leary's advice to "turn on, tune in and drop out," the old social institutions would wither away. Often, however, it had very little idea about what would replace them, assuming that this would become clear as the revolution progressed. This vagueness meant that it was widely regarded by the old left as being at best irrelevant and at worst counter-revolutionary.

In fact, though, it is not always possible to draw a hard-and-fast distinction between the two strands of left-wing theatre, as Bull points out:

> The relationship has been mutually symbiotic, the *avant-garde* being increasingly infused with a didactic seriousness as the seventies advanced, and the agit-prop groupings readily borrowing techniques from fringe and alternative theatre.[3]

This symbiosis was limited, however, by the blinkered vision of the conventional left in Britain, based in the trade unions, whose obsession with wages exhibited a materialism and a denial of "spirituality" to which the radicals objected. For this reason many activists, including many literary figures, turned to Western Marxism in the search for a theoretical analysis of their social concerns; in particular, to those variants which shared with the counter-culture an emphasis on human consciousness.[4]

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1. John Bull, *New British Political Dramatists* (London: Macmillan, 1984).
2. Bull, p. 25.
3. Bull, p. 25.
4. This search became more urgent after the events in Paris during May 1968, which convinced many followers of the counter-culture that the reactionary forces ranged against them were too strong to be overthrown by the unorganised and passive strategies which they had adopted up till then.

So while the *avant-garde* had imbibed much that was not Marxist, it is impossible to understand it properly without examining Western Marxism, which emerged in response to a number of events in the early decades of the twentieth century. First, there was the acceptance of the First World War by the working classes of Europe, and even by the parties which were supposedly their spiritual leaders. The German Social Democratic Party, in particular, had become respectable, bureaucratic and totally unrevolutionary. This was followed by the failure of socialist revolutions after the war in Germany, Hungary and elsewhere, and the rise of Fascism. Conventional Marxist theory seemed unable to account for the passivity of the working class in this classical revolutionary situation. The proletariat had not risen *en masse* against their capitalist oppressors, and when they did become politically aware they seemed more likely to turn to Hitler and Mussolini than to Rosa Luxemburg and Antonio Gramsci. Although Marxism provided an economic and political account of the oppression of the working class, it did not offer a psychological explanation of why the people concerned did not behave as expected. In other words, classical Marxism was a good theory of objective social conditions, but not of subjectivity.[5]

This interest in psychological oppression, as well as economic and political oppression, was fostered by the publication in 1932 of Marx's *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*. In this work, which was unknown to his immediate successors, he introduces the concept of alienation, "the intellectual construct in which Marx displays the devastating effect of capitalist production on human beings, on their physical and mental states and on the social processes of which they are a part."[6] This became increasingly important for Western Marxism, especially in the 1950s and 60s, because of the emergence of the capitalist welfare state and the stultification of the trade union movement. Poverty, the attack on which had been one of the major weapons in the left's arsenal during the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth, seemed to be declining in the developed nations, so those who were still dissatisfied with society had to look elsewhere. It is therefore not surprising that the affluent young radicals of the counter-culture should have adopted, as one of their basic principles, the thesis that "there are forms of oppression other than purely

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5. There was also the problem of the failure of the Russian Revolution, as the dictatorship of the proletariat became the dictatorship of the Party under Lenin, and then the dictatorship of Stalin. This raised important questions about political strategy for the left, in particular the role of the Party, but they do not concern us here.

6. Bertell Ollman, *Alienation: Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1971), p. 131. There has been considerable debate about whether Marx rejected the concept of alienation in his later work, or whether it remained central to his entire programme, but again this need not concern us here.

economic oppression, and in particular, the technocratic/ bureaucratic form of social organization is alienating and de-humanizing."[7]

One of the most interesting political playwrights to emerge from the *avant-garde* is David Hare. He has considered the same problem as that faced by Gramsci, and has come to the same conclusions:

> . . . we have lived through a time of economic depression, which classically in Marxist theory is supposed to throw up those critical moments at which the proletariat may seize power. And yet, in my own estimate, European countries have been more unstable during times of affluence than times of depression. It is hard to believe in the historical inevitability of something which has so frequently not happened, or rather, often been nearest to happening in places and circumstances furthest away from those predicted by the man who first suggested it.[8]

This could be seen as evidence of dissatisfaction with Marxism, if he did not go on to say that "the challenge of communism, in however debased and ugly a form, is to ask whether the criteria by which we have been brought up are right. . . . However absolute the sufferings of men in the totalitarian Soviet countries, however decadent the current life of the West, the fact is that this question has only just been asked, and we have not even the first hundredth of an answer. To give up now would be death."[9] Like many of those on the left in the West, he is bitterly critical of the injustices behind the Iron Curtain, yet still idealistic enough to believe that people need not be oppressed.

Portable Theatre, which Hare founded with Tony Bicat in 1968, was not originally political in the normal sense of the word, though the intention "to take theatre to places where it normally didn't go" was in itself a political aim.[10] Their first productions were literary pieces such as *Inside Out*, a dramatisation of Kafka's diaries done jointly by Hare and Bicat, and works on Genet and William Blake, which show more concern for theatre as an art form than as a political medium. By the early 1970s (which is where this study begins), however, Hare had become more overtly political, like many other playwrights who emerged from the counter-culture.

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7. David Bouchier, *Idealism and Revolution: New Ideologies of Liberation in Britain and the United States* (London: Edward Arnold, 1978), p. 7.
8. Hare, "Lecture," p. 62.
9. Hare, "Lecture," pp. 69-70. Despite his terminology, Hare obviously intends this statement to refer to the suffering of *women* as well. Several of the theorists quoted in this thesis are guilty of this unfortunate linguistic inaccuracy, but I will not comment on any other examples.
10. David Hare, "From Portable Theatre to Joint Stock . . . via Shaftesbury Avenue," *Theatre Quarterly*, 5, No. 20 (Dec. 1975 - Feb. 1976), p. 109; hereafter cited as "From Portable."

Having placed Hare in this theatrical tradition, we are able to compare his political stance with that of his contemporaries. Perhaps the most interesting difference is that he concentrates on what Althusser calls Ideological State Apparatuses, while many of the agit-prop writers deal almost exclusively with Repressive State Apparatuses. That is, Hare explores the *hidden* oppression exercised by the family, the education system, the church, the culture industry and the media, instead of the *overt* domination of the population by the police, the courts, the army, the government, the state bureaucracy etc.[11] This emphasis on the de-humanising effect of contemporary society links him with playwrights as diverse as Edward Bond, Snoo Wilson, Stephen Poliakoff and Caryl Churchill, while his apparent lack of interest in the working class distances him from McGrath, Edgar, John Arden and Margaretta D'Arcy. These omissions have made him the target of criticism from other left-wing dramatists, but in Hare's defence it is possible to argue that at least some of these gaps are the result not of ideological blindness but of conscious strategic decisions.

## I

Alienation, the fundamental category of both the counter-culture and Western Marxism, is Hare's main target. Before considering his plays in detail, it will be useful to examine the concept more closely. Marx writes that capitalism produces the individual as "a *mentally* and *physically* dehumanized being."[12] Under capitalism, the individual inevitably develops a Jekyll-and-Hyde personality:

> . . . in the course of historical evolution, and precisely through the inevitable fact that within the division of labour social relationships take on an independent existence, there appears a division within the life of each individual, insofar as it is personal and insofar as it is determined by some branch of labour and the conditions pertaining to it.[13]

Marx describes four kinds of alienation. The two most basic kinds concern the worker, who is alienated from his or her labour and from the product of that labour. Both of these forms of alienation result from the transformation of the products of labour into commodities rather than useful objects.

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11. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," in *Lenin and Philosophy and other essays* (London: New Left Books, 1971), pp. 121-173. Hare would not agree with Althusser's second thesis in this essay, however, which is that "the 'ideas' or 'representations', etc., which seem to make up ideology do not have an ideal or spiritual existence, but a material existence"(155). Hare is quite happy to refer to the repressive influence of *ideas*, rather than the material institutions in which those ideas find their meaning.

12. Karl Marx, *Early Writings*, ed. T. B. Bottomore (London: C. A. Watts, 1963), p. 138.

13. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1970), pp. 83-84.

*Everyone* suffers from alienation, however, because the factory owner's life is just as much controlled by the needs of the prevailing economic order as that of the lowest worker.[14] Marx had this to say about the bourgeoisie in *The German Ideology* in 1846:

> . . . the class in its turn achieves an independent existence over against the individuals, so that the latter find their conditions of existence predestined, and hence have their position in life and their personal development assigned to them by their class, become subsumed under it.[15]

Hare focuses on capitalists, and since the capitalist does not stand in the same direct relation to labour as the worker, it is the other two forms of alienation which are most relevant to the study of Hare's plays.

The first of these is the individual's alienation from other individuals. Richard Schacht writes that "the alienation from other men of which Marx speaks is to be understood as involving a complete absence of fellow feeling, an estimation of others as of no more positive significance than that of means to personal ends, and an antagonism based on a feeling of rivalry and the anticipation of attempted counter-exploitation."[16] The difficulties of human relationships, not just between the sexes but between all individuals, can therefore be traced to alienation.[17] The second relevant form of alienation is self-alienation: "a man is self-alienated for Marx if his true 'human' nature is something alien to him -- if his life fails to manifest the characteristics of a truly human life."[18]

These two forms of alienation are brilliantly exemplified in Brecht's *The Good Person of Sechzuan.* The heroine, Shen Teh, becomes rich, but finds that there is an inescapable contradiction between the role of Good Person, which is what she is naturally inclined to be, and that of Rich Person, so she is forced to invent an evil cousin, Shui Ta, to take the blame for the unpleasant things which the preservation of her wealth forces her to do. Sometimes the good side of her personality is dominant, and sometimes the bad, and they seem to act independently of each other. She is estranged from her friends (in fact, from all people), because Shui Ta can only regard them as bludgers, economic liabilities rather than people. And she is *self-alienated*

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14. This implies that everyone would benefit from radical social change, and hence that socialist consciousness is no longer the sole and natural province of the proletariat. This, of course, justifies Hare's willingness to enter the Establishment theatre (though it does not explain his almost exclusive interest in the middle class).
15. Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, p. 82.
16. Richard Schacht, *Alienation* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971), p. 96.
17. Though not necessarily, as we shall see, to alienation caused by capitalist power structures alone.
18. Schacht, p. 102.

because her natural goodness has to be suppressed in the interests of profit. It is as if she has really become two different people.

Hare shares the aim of overcoming alienation with many other Western Marxists. The difficulty which he faces is the willingness of the vast majority of the population to persist with a system which in his eyes falls far short of what is possible. If the injustice and alienation is obvious to him, why is it not to everyone else as well? Like the early Western Marxists in the 1920s and 30s, he must understand why the oppressed are so passive in the face of their oppression. Only then can he work out a strategy for raising the political awareness of his audience.

The problem of people's indifference and hostility towards political movements which it would be to their advantage to support can be approached from two different perspectives, both of which will be valuable in this thesis. One of these, which could be described as sociological, is that adopted by Gramsci, who introduced the concept of *hegemony*. This is usually defined as "leadership through consent," and explains why subordinate groups in society (workers, women, homosexuals, ethnic minorities) seem willing to remain subordinate for so much of the time. The hegemonic group dominates not through force, but because it is able to manipulate the beliefs and attitudes of the rest of society.

This control over people's behaviour is achieved through ideology. This consists of both moral injunctions and assertions about the nature of reality (society, human nature, etc.) which promote "false consciousness" — that is, which encourage people to act in ways contrary to their own best interests. In Western society, the education system, the press and the entertainment industry are controlled almost exclusively by white, middle-class men, and it is no accident that most of the ideas disseminated by these institutions support the *status quo*. The American rags-to-riches myth is a good example of ideology. If everyone has the *potential* to be at the top of the heap, it becomes the individual's fault that he or she is still unsuccessful, because he or she is not clever enough, or does not work hard enough. Attention is deflected away from the inequities of the system. This simultaneously offers a justification for those who have succeeded, and promotes a sense among those who have not that they do not deserve to.

Ideology is not always explicitly political, or even propositional, because covert propaganda can be just as effective in fashioning what the public wants, and hence what the public does. As the advertising industry knows, manipulating people's desires will influence their behaviour. The vast number of television shows which equate happiness with a fast car, a grand house and an expensive spouse have the effect of encouraging viewers to try to get these things for themselves. And if people

are busy striving for the rewards offered by the system, they will not stop to question whether that system is the best one possible.[19]

The other attempt to account for the reluctance of the workers to espouse socialism involved a Marxist rewriting of psychoanalytic theory by Herbert Marcuse, Erich Fromm, and several others who were at one time or another associated with the Frankfurt School of Social Research (Institut für Sozialforschung), as well as by independent psychiatric theorists like Wilhelm Reich.[20] Instead of concentrating on the macroscopic social forces which mould people's thoughts and feelings, as Gramsci did, the Freudian left dealt with the microcosm, the workings of the individual psyche in a repressed society. This is simply the other side of the same coin; both approaches are valid, and both will be used in this thesis.

Marcuse's explanation of the weakness of the socialist movement relies on Freud's notion of introjection:

> . . . ever since the first, prehistoric restoration of domination following the first rebellion, repression from without has been supported by repression from within: the unfree individual introjects his masters and their commands into his own mental apparatus. The struggle against freedom reproduces itself in the psyche of man, as the self-repression of the repressed individual, and his self-repression in turn sustains his masters and their institutions.[21]

Gramsci's hegemony is therefore established through introjection, and ideology is what is introjected. As with ideology, however, there are different forms of manipulation, which operate on different parts of the psyche.

One form consists of the moral imperatives of ideology, which form the conscience:

> . . . a number of societal and cultural influences are taken in by the superego until it coagulates into the powerful representative of established morality and "what people call the 'higher' things in human life."[22]

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19. Of course, beliefs about the nature of reality etc. also influence one's desires but, unlike such statements as, "I like chocolate," they can be defended (and therefore attacked) on rational grounds: "X is good because of Y." For example, a person's desire to be wealthy may be influenced in part by Adam Smith's theory that this will benefit the community as a whole.

20. Like Marx in his interpretation of Hegel, these people believed that it was necessary to "decode" Freud, in order to separate the useful elements of his theory from the ahistorical language in which it was couched. Marcuse writes that *Eros and Civilization* "is an 'extrapolation,' which derives from Freud's theory notions and propositions implied in it only in a reified form, in which historical processes appear as natural (biological) processes." *Eros and Civilization* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1956), p. 35.

21. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 16.

22. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 32.

Hegemony is not established solely by *moral justifications* of the *status quo*, however, but also by *empirical* statements absorbed by the ego, which mediates between the desires of the id, the moral injunctions of the super-ego and the external world to ensure the individual's survival. Our perceptions of the external world are largely socially determined, so the form of this mediation, and hence our behaviour, is influenced by the prevailing picture of "reality." And even the id is subject to control, as the individual is socialised to accept what Marcuse calls "false" needs, "which are superimposed upon the individual by particular social interests in his repression: the needs which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice."[23]

The Freudian left, like other forms of Western Marxism, was more concerned with the psychological evils of capitalism than with the economic. Freud talked of repression as something inevitable, "the 'modifications' of the instincts necessary for the perpetuation of the human race in civilization."[24] Marcuse modifies this to include a political element in his concept of "surplus repression":

> Within the total structure of the repressed personality, surplus-repression is that portion which is the result of specific societal conditions sustained in the specific interest of domination.[25]

There are strong similarities between this notion and Marx's concept of alienation. Marcuse makes the link explicit when he writes that "alienated labor is absence of gratification, negation of the pleasure principle."[26] Since it is not necessary for labour to be alienated, the negation of the pleasure principle (repression) which it produces is also not necessary, that is, surplus.[27]

Marcuse confirms the fact that alienation is not restricted to the ruled, since the rulers also have to introject those values which will maintain their superiority:

> The progress from domination by one to domination by several involves a "social spread" of pleasure and makes repression self-imposed in the ruling group itself: *all* its members have to obey the taboos if they want to maintain their rule. Repression now permeates the life of the oppressors themselves, and part of their instinctual energy becomes available for sublimation in "work."[28]

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23. Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), p. 5.
24. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 35.
25. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, pp. 87-88.
26. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 45.
27. Paul Robinson writes in *The Freudian Left* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1970), pp. 202 ff., that surplus repression corresponds not to alienation but to surplus value, and that alienation corresponds to the performance principle. Yet the distinction between repression and surplus repression seems to be very similar to Marx's distinction between objectification and reification; the former is inevitable but not bad, while the latter is both harmful and avoidable. And since reification is the basis of alienation, it is reasonable to link alienation and surplus repression.
28. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 65.

If a lie is to be big enough to convince all the disadvantaged members of society, the people who benefit from it must believe it, too. Edward Bond, one of the major British political playwrights of the sixties, echoes this when he says that "Plato wanted his rulers to knowingly lie. The members of our ruling class are not liars but — worse — fools who believe their own mythology. In ignorance they teach an intellectual corruption, and it is accepted in naïvety."[29]

Brecht tries to show that Shen Teh would be happier if she could give up her alienated existence, even at the cost of losing some of her material advantages. Hare believes that the same is true of his audience, so he would probably agree with this statement by Charles Reich:

> Even a millionaire would in actual fact be "better off" if he chose liberation instead of the plastic world of material wealth. If he exchanged wealth, status and power for love, creativity, and liberation he would be far happier; he would "make a good bargain."[30]

It will not be easy to convince the millionaire of this, however, since it is possible to be alienated without knowing it. This is especially true of the moneyed classes. Marx and Engels write that "the propertied class and the class of the proletariat present the same human self-estrangement. But the former class feels at ease and strengthened in this self-estrangement, it recognises estrangement as *its own power* and has in it the *semblance* of a human existence."[31] So Hare's first task is to challenge the existing hegemony.

There are two ways in which he can do this. The first is by showing that the ideological beliefs which support the *status quo* are false. If, for example, it were shown that different races have identical intellectual capacity, this would remove one rationalisation for racism. This demythologising is an important element of Hare's political programme. But on its own it is not enough, because it is not only people's moral and empirical beliefs which are controlled, but their desires as well. Obviously, the same approach cannot be taken to these, because it does not even make sense to say that a desire is *factually* wrong. If it is mistaken, it must be so because of the effects it will have. As well as showing that ideology is (epistemologically) *false* consciousness, he must also show that it is *destructive* consciousness.

Its destructiveness lies in the fact that ideology, which is a *social* phenomenon, is the cause of many *personal* problems. Alienation is not an obscure metaphysical concept, but a rampant (if largely undiagnosed) social disease. While everyone will

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29. Edward Bond, "Author's Note: On Violence," in *Plays: One* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1977), p. 11.
30. Charles Reich, *The Greening of America* (New York: Random Press, 1970), p. 310.
31. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Holy Family*, in *Collected Works* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1975), Vol. IV, p. 36.

admit to anxiety and despair at times, to a feeling that they are cut off from everything around them, most people assume that these emotions are unrelated to the structure of the society in which they live. If Hare can persuade his audience that this unhappiness is neither unique to each individual, nor an inevitable part of the human condition, but is the product of a perverted and inhumane system, then he may be able to convert them to his way of thinking.

This unhappiness is the result of a schism within the individual of the kind which Marx discussed. Marx would have said that this is the result of a separation from our essential humanity, but since essentialism frequently involves attributing particular culturally determined traits to the entire human race (as it does in Freud, for example), Hare is likely to avoid this covert élitism by talking about a contradiction within the socialisation process. Shen Teh is a good person because she has been *socialised* to be kind, considerate, and generous, and the contradiction arises when another part of her socialisation, the desire for profit, comes into play, because the two are incompatible. Her money gives her little satisfaction, because she knows what she is doing even if no one else does. There is inevitably a conflict between what we have been brought up to believe we should do and what we are required to do in order to make a living.

The contradictions in a social system are reflected in the minds of its members, and this conflict becomes more obvious when the values and beliefs which we were taught as children become outdated. As the economic system evolves, one set of socially engendered ideals becomes obsolete and is replaced by another:

> The superego thus enforces not only the demands of reality but also those of a *past* reality. By virtue of these unconscious mechanisms, the mental development lags behind the real development, or (since the former is itself a factor in the latter) retards the real development, denies its potentialities in the name of the past.[32]

Eventually the unreality of our introjected ideals, which was hidden as long as they were socially useful, becomes more apparent. But since they are fundamental to a person's sense of identity, there is a great reluctance to reject them. In fact, it is probably impossible to jettison one's socialisation entirely, but to be forced to do so even partially is likely to cause a severe mental crisis. Of course, there is a strong temptation to reject society's new values rather than to admit that one's own are out of date, and many of the characters in Hare's plays become disillusioned not because they

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32. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 33. Gramsci says something similar when he writes of the proletarian that "he has two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness): one which is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow-workers in the practical transformation of the real world; and one, superficially explicit or verbal, which he has inherited from the past and uncritically absorbed." *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), p. 333.

recognise the failings of the system, but because of what they perceive as a moral decay in society. In both cases, the people concerned are unhappy, and in neither case is it their own fault. So Hare must persuade the members of his audience that their dissatisfaction with their lot does not represent a flaw in themselves or in their personal circumstances, but reveals the inhumanity of the society which creates their false desires and expectations. Then he must show that this state of affairs can be changed.

## II

The injustice of the class system is not the only form of oppression. Marxism has traditionally concentrated on the economic structure of society, the way men and women of one class oppress men and women of another class. When it has mentioned the injustice of the patriarchy, that is, the way men of all classes oppress women of all classes, it has usually treated it as a by-product of class society, which will disappear after the socialist revolution. Radical feminism, on the other hand, makes the patriarchy the fount of all evil. Both forms of reductionism are notoriously unsuccessful.[33] Hare, who has clearly been influenced by the debate between radical and Marxist feminists in the 1970s, lies somewhere in the socialist feminist camp, which argues that any revolution which ignores one group of oppressed people while liberating another is woefully inadequate:

> On the socialist feminist analysis, capitalism, male dominance, racism and imperialism are intertwined so inextricably that they are inseparable; consequently the abolition of any of these systems of domination requires the end of all of them.[34]

The two structures of oppression are separate but related. Not surprisingly, they overlap to a great extent, with changes in one sphere affecting changes in the other. Because they manifest themselves as different forms of oppression, they can be treated as separate targets. Yet as they are so closely related, an attack on one must constitute an attack on some aspect of the other. And the same weapons are needed for both struggles, since the issues of power, money and alienation are central to both.

The concepts of alienation and ideology which apply to capitalism are also crucial to an understanding of the patriarchy. The contradictions between the expectations which class society creates in its members and the roles which it imposes on them cause alienation. The same is true of the roles which are enforced by the existing relations between the sexes. The unhappy alternatives of housewife-mother

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33. "The paralysis of a male-defined revolutionary movement is as evident as the paralysis of a consciousness which can comprehend only the liberation of women. Both are caught in their own particularity." Sheila Rowbotham, *Women, Resistance and Revolution* (London: Allen Lane, 1972), p. 12.

34. Alison M. Jaggar, *Feminist Politics and Human Nature* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Allanheld, 1983), p. 124.

and spinster-artist which Edna Pontellier faces in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* are examples of the restriction of women's opportunities to develop to their full potential — that is, of their self-alienation. Men are also alienated from themselves, because although the range of choices available to them is far greater, they suffer from the machismo which has dominated Western society, which causes them to suppress many of their emotional needs. And by transforming everyone into rivals (sexual rather than economic), the competitive attitudes of the centuries-old "battle of the sexes" alienate each person from everyone else; not only from people of the opposite sex, but also men from men and women from women. Everyone, therefore, has a lot to gain from the rejection of the destructive sex-roles which stem from the hegemony of the patriarchy.

This hegemony is established in exactly the same way as the hegemony of a dominant class, through ideology and the promulgation of false desires which are introjected by the individual. As well as those myths which discourage attempts to remove economic and political imbalances between *classes*, there also exist a large number of myths about women, men, and their respective roles in society, which encourage acceptance of the domination of one *sex* over the other. In his history plays Hare examines two of these in some detail. The first and oldest is the ideology of romantic love:

> I write love stories. Most of my plays are that. Over and over again I have written about romantic love, because it never goes away. And the view of the world it provides, the dislocation it offers, is the most intense experience that many people know on earth.
>
> And I write comedy because . . . such ideas as the one I have just uttered make me laugh.[35]

The unrealistic nature of this love may be ridiculous and amusing, but it also causes a great deal of anguish. The roles which romanticism allows to women are especially constricting, being almost entirely confined to serving men in various ways. Hare wants to demonstrate that the difficulties in relations between the sexes, and the loneliness and anxiety which are directly or indirectly generated by them, are social in origin.

The second myth which Hare considers in depth is that of the glorification of sex. This is more recent than romanticism; it probably arose in about the 1920s, but only became a major social force after the invention of the Pill. Clearly, sex and love are related, but the alleged "emancipation" offered to women by the sexual revolution is at odds with popular notions of fidelity, which are an essential part of romantic love. While the contradiction between these two myths — treating women either as china

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35. Hare, "Lecture," p. 69.

dolls or as inflatable dolls — may suggest that ideology has changed, its function has remained constant. As we shall see in Chapter 4, it still acts to keep women subordinate to men, and willingly so, but it does so in a more modern form.

There are definite similarities between Hare's treatment of the patriarchy and his treatment of capitalism. In both cases he emphasises alienation — the *psychological* disadvantages of acting according to the false beliefs promoted by ideology — rather than political or economic oppression. And his message to men is the same as his message to the capitalist class: the oppressors would benefit from more equal relations in society, between the sexes as well as in the distribution of wealth, since the loss of power would be far outweighed by the emotional advantages. Hare is trying to enlist men to the feminist cause, just as he is trying to enlist the bourgeoisie to socialism.

There are limitations to his discussion of women, however. Obviously, the two forms of ideology which he examines in detail only constitute part of women's oppression, and his history of the ideology of the patriarchy over the last forty years is less complete than that of the ideology of capitalism.[36] In fact, his portrayal of women has met with severe criticism from some influential feminists, in particular Michelene Wandor in her books, *Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics* and *Look Back in Gender: Sexuality and the Family in Post-War British Drama*.[37] Some of Wandor's criticisms are quite correct, and I will return to them in later chapters. But while Hare's early plays are certainly sometimes quite appalling in their unconscious sexism, the examination of romanticism in his later plays shows that he has re-evaluated his assumptions. This fulfils Wandor's own criterion that "for men to see women differently [that is, to overcome their own sexism] must necessarily mean seeing themselves and their relationships to women differently."[38]

## III

Through his analysis of the alienation caused by capitalist and patriarchal ideology, Hare intends to show his audience that many of the ideas and values which they have accepted as axiomatic are really an onerous burden. His political strategy is very similar to Gramsci's, as described here by Joseph Femia:

> An indispensable condition of permanent proletarian victory in the revolutionary struggle is, in Gramsci's words, a 'detachment of civil society from political society . . .', that is, the erosion of bourgeois

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36. Of all the history plays, *Dreams of Leaving* is probably the only one which is more concerned with patriarchy than with capitalism.
37. *Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1981) and *Look Back in Gender: Sexuality and the Family in Post-War British Drama* (London: Methuen, 1987).
38. Wandor, *Understudies*, p. 84.

> ideological dominance and its replacement by a Marxist *counter-*hegemony, a turning of the popular mind to new principles.[39]

Of course there is a paradox here, as both Gramsci and Marcuse realise: "this is the vicious circle: the rupture with the self-propelling conservative continuum of needs must *precede* the revolution which is to usher in a free society, but such rupture itself can be envisaged only in a revolution."[40] The more people who accept these new principles, the easier it will be to achieve a more equal society. Although Hare would disagree with Gramsci's implication that this new consciousness is the natural property of the proletariat, his purpose is the same, to establish a counter-hegemony. And his method, as we have seen, is to show people that they are suffering from false consciousness.

There is a problem with talking about "false" consciousness, however. If Hare regards his counter-hegemony as *true*, then his opponents could criticise him either on factual details, obscuring the political points at issue, or on philosophical grounds, accusing him of naïve epistemological realism. Certainly his re-writing of British history, and his reliance on the gap between ideology and "reality" to get his message across, suggest that he believes his version to be a more accurate picture of society than the traditional one. But Hare does not subscribe to "scientific" Marxism, which treats false consciousness as "factually" false, and looks to "reality" for its bench-mark. Instead, he views it as "practically" false, and examines the *consequences* of acting in accordance with a particular set of beliefs to decide whether it is good or bad. The dichotomy between false consciousness and destructive consciousness is actually misleading; ideology is false *because* it is destructive. So he feels quite justified in treating his assertions about the causes of alienation in contemporary British society as "true," because they are at least as plausible as those that he is challenging and, if acted upon, they could provide the foundations for a more equal community in which people would be happier than they are at present.

It may seem odd that Hare never gives any hint of what this ideal society would be like, but in fact his counter-hegemony is essentially a negative one. One justification for this is that as soon as he offers his recipe for an ideal world he becomes an élitist, because he imposes his own vision on everyone else. The main reason for Hare's reluctance to say what the world will be like after the wished-for revolution, however, is that we simply cannot know. It is not merely a matter of exchanging one political system for another, but of a complete change of consciousness. Even human nature, that supposedly monolithic entity, will be profoundly altered. This is one of the lessons of *Fanshen* (1975), Hare's only

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39. Joseph V. Femia, *Gramsci's Political Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 191.
40. Herbert Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 18.

remotely Utopian play to date. The inhabitants of the post-revolutionary Chinese village of Long Bow must take part in a continuing process of self-criticism as they struggle to achieve a genuinely free and equal society, and at the end of the play they still have a long way to go. Hare, like Marx, is aware that if he offered any concrete alternatives he would risk appearing ridiculous.[41] The most that he can attempt to do, therefore, is to motivate his audiences to work for change, teach them to think critically about their own society, and suggest those aspects which seem to him to be in most urgent need of change.

These aims account for some of the typical features of his plays. For one thing, they explain why he undertook the project of writing a social history of Britain since the Second World War. He is concerned to debunk some of the myths which have arisen about English society, in order to show people that they are suffering from false consciousness. Because of the tendency for people to persist with outdated ideology long after the social conditions that gave rise to it have changed, it is important to examine the past in order to understand the problems of the present. Whenever he can, Hare traces social myths to their origin; if he can show that they were not true even when they developed, then they cannot be true now.

There is another, more specific reason for writing history plays. This is to undermine the ideological belief in the immutability of the social order, a belief which according to Ernest Mandel is becoming increasingly common:

> To the captive individual, whose entire life is subordinate to the laws of the market — not only (as in the 19th century) in the sphere of production, but also in the sphere of consumption, recreation, culture, art, education, and personal relations, it appears impossible to break out of the social prison. 'Every-day experience' reinforces and internalizes the neo-fatalist ideology of the immutable nature of the late capitalist social order.[42]

As long as people believe that the *status quo* cannot be altered, there is little point in attempting to educate them in the evils of capitalism or of the patriarchy. If political awareness is to be turned into positive action, then it is first necessary to persuade people that change is possible in principle, however difficult it may be in practice. Hare proves that, contrary to appearances, society is never static, by showing the tremendous changes which have taken place in Britain in the last forty years:

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41. See, for example, Marx's account of life after the revolution in *The German Ideology*, which must surely be ironic. He writes that "in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic." *The German Ideology*, p. 53.

42. Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism* (London: New Left Books, 1975), p. 502.

> . . . if you write about now, just today and nothing else, then you seem to be confronting only stasis; but if you begin to describe the movement of history, if you write plays that cover passages of time, then you begin to find a sense of movement, of social change, if you like; and the facile hopelessness that comes from confronting the day and only the day, the room and only the room, begins to disappear and in its place the writer can offer a record of movement and change.[43]

This movement of history has not affected the fundamental inequality of society, but once people realise that society is always changing, then it will be possible to convince them that it *can* change in the direction in which they believe it should. This accounts for one of the most typical features of Hare's plays, the time shifts. *Brassneck*, *Plenty*, *Wetherby* and, to a lesser extent, *Dreams of Leaving* and *Licking Hitler,* all contain more than one time scheme.

Hare's political message also explains why his style is basically realistic, and why, with the exception of Archie Maclean in *Licking Hitler*, all of his major characters are middle class. Unlike Brecht, he relies heavily on his audience's identification with the characters in his plays, because he is showing them their own anxieties on stage, in an extreme form, so that they can see the causes. As well as showing that certain widely held attitudes are false, he wants to show that they are destructive. As we saw earlier, this is an especially valuable tactic, because it allows him to challenge people's desires as well as their beliefs. It is also more likely to work, because the purely *intellectual* recognition that a particular opinion is wrong does not necessarily mean that we will reject it. Such is the power of psychological inertia. If Hare can convince his audience of hitherto unseen links between the actions which a certain belief gives rise to and their personal problems, then they are more likely to change their view of the world. Self-interest is often a more effective weapon for change than rationality.

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43. Hare, "Lecture," p. 66.

## Chapter 2
## Love and war: *Licking Hitler*

Although *Licking Hitler* covers the earliest period treated in Hare's account of modern British history, it was the fourth in the series to be written, being televised by the BBC in January 1978. It portrays the staff of a propaganda unit in an English country house called Wendlesham during the Second World War and, apart from a brief but important postscript, deals solely with the period from the middle of 1941 to early 1942. Hare writes of the propaganda unit's activities that "to me they seemed to speak not just of England then but of England now."[1] This suggests that the play's relevance lies in the fact that it functions as a *direct* allegory, and there are some interesting parallels between Wendlesham and modern Britain. For example, Wendlesham is a propaganda factory, and ideology is still being used to deceive the public, as propaganda was used to deceive the Germans. Another similarity is that the Research Unit is a totally isolated community, whose members never have to see the damage that they do. Many middle class people today have the same head-in-the-sand attitude, remaining impervious to the economic pain which those below them on the social scale are suffering. But these parallels are far from exact; to argue that propaganda is still being *deliberately* produced would be to fall prey to a naïve conspiracy theory. In fact, the oppressors are taken in by ideology just as much as the oppressed. In any case, the allegory would only be apparent if the audience were given signs which would enable it to make the appropriate connections, and these signs are lacking. So *Licking Hitler* does not speak of "England now" in a *direct* manner. Instead, the link between the past and the present is not allegorical but causal. Hare shows the *origins* of one aspect of contemporary ideology: the false belief that the war brought about a general levelling in British society. He traces this myth back to its source, and by proving that it was not true *then* he aims to persuade his viewers that it is not true *now*.

Ideological beliefs such as this one have adverse effects both on society as a whole and on individuals within society. This means that the play functions on two separate but related levels, to achieve different political goals. One level concerns society as a whole. This misinterpretation of history allows people to think that all the worst injustices of capitalism have been solved, and that those that remain can easily be fixed without significant disruption of the existing system. This promotes complacency, and is therefore an impediment to social change. Using the propaganda

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1. David Hare, "Introduction," in *The History Plays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1984), p. 13; hereafter cited as "Introduction."

unit at Wendlesham as a microcosm of Britain, Hare attempts to redress this distortion of history with two distinct arguments. First, he shows that the inequality which was rampant in English society, and the strength of the forces defending that inequality, set obstacles in the path of genuine change which were not overcome. He supports this by comparing the moral standing of the British war leaders with that of the Nazis, to demonstrate that they were not the benevolent protectors of the people which history makes them out to be. Secondly, he points out that the myth that inequality virtually disappeared in Britain during and after the war refers only to the inequality of *class*. It completely ignores the patriarchal system which keeps women subordinate to men. So even if the general leveling of class *had* taken place, the country would still not be the Utopia that has sometimes been proclaimed.

The more important level of the play concerns *individuals*. Ideology has destructive *psychological* as well as social effects, because it motivates people to act in ways which are self-defeating. Hare does not restrict himself solely to the false belief in the equality of modern Britain, however. He also examines fatalism, through the character of Archie Maclean, who spends the war years frustrated because he believes he is powerless to combat the continuing injustice which he sees around him, and hating himself because he is not trying to. And through Anna Seaton, who falls in love with the man who rapes her, he analyses the causes of some forms of masochistic behaviour among women. The play addresses contemporary issues by demonstrating that personal problems can have deep-rooted social causes. Hare wants to convince people that they are the victims of the myths which society creates about itself and its members. If he can do this then they may stop believing these myths, and may even challenge the institutions which perpetuate them. This would be an important step towards radical social change.

## I

So Hare's first aim is to challenge the view that the war turned Britain into a just and humane society. Although it created a *desire* for greater equality, it did not satisfy this desire, despite all the propaganda to the contrary. *Licking Hitler* takes its basic idea from Angus Calder's *The People's War*, a history of civilian life during the war.[2] Hare writes that this book "attempts a complete alternative history to the phoney and corrupting history I was taught at school."[3] As long as this historical fallacy that the hopes and promises of the war years have been fulfilled persists, people will deny the need for change, so challenging it has to be the first step in raising his audience's political awareness. A selective survey of British high school history textbooks for the

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2. It takes its factual basis from *Black Boomerang* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1962), Sefton Delmer's autobiographical account of his work as director of black propaganda units during the war.
3. "Lecture," p. 66.

late 1950s and early 1960s, when Hare was at school, indicates the sort of misinformation he is referring to.

In these books the assumption that there is nothing wrong with the existing system is sometimes explicit:

> With wealth much more equally distributed than ever before, and higher education much more readily available to families of modest means, there has even been some lessening of the old pre-war social distinctions. Perceptibly, *Britain has advanced some way towards the Socialist goal of a classless society.* [4]

At other times the ideological content is veiled, as in this pompous appeal against selfishness:

> These three developments [the Welfare State, nuclear power and the Common Market] hold out great hopes of security, comfort and happiness. But there is one danger which may disappoint these hopes, a danger which lies within each-one of us, and is not some remote threat, like the H-bomb, which we cannot control. However successfully statesmen and scientists work for the security, comfort and happiness of men, their success can never be a substitute for man's own disciplined and unselfish efforts to serve the community to which he belongs. If the result of these new possibilities of prosperity is to make people grasp greedily for advantages for themselves at the expense of the rest of the community and expect to win prosperity without effort, the new opportunities will be lost. For now, as at every other time in the history of the world, a community as a whole can prosper only if its members all play their part and refrain from seeking their own private interests without proper regard for the interests of all.[5]

This claim that all society's problems are the result of greedy individuals or organisations upsetting the basic equilibrium is a perfect example of the way that the education system attempts to mould children into passive, conformist adults. Both of these quotations encourage a smug, uncritical acceptance of the proposition that the situation is as good as we could reasonably expect, and therefore that questioning the way society is run is unproductive, even treasonable.

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4. Denis Richards and Anthony Quick, *Twentieth Century Britain* (London: Longmans, 1968), p. 480; my italics.

5. C. H. C. Blount, *The Last Hundred Years*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 170-71. For further examples, see the list of high school history texts in W. H. Burston and C. W. Green, eds., *A Handbook for History Teachers* (London: Methuen, 1962).

Of course, not all the textbooks of the time are as partial as these extracts, but there is no shortage of evidence that this belief was widespread while Hare was growing up. This explains the relevance of the play to the late seventies, when the Second World War was a distant memory for the bulk of the audience, and an even larger proportion would have had no direct experience of it at all. If Hare's whole generation, or at least a large proportion of it, was raised on a false, romantic vision of the war and its effects, then this myth will have been passed on to the next generation as well, since the children of the fifties are the history teachers of the seventies and eighties.

How exactly does Hare attack this myth? His basic argument is the same as Calder's:

> The war was fought with the willing brains and hearts of the most vigorous elements in the community, the educated, the skilled, the bold, the active, the young, who worked more and more consciously towards a transformed post-war world.
>
> Thanks to their energy, the forces of wealth, bureaucracy and privilege survived with little inconvenience, recovered from their shock, and began to proceed with their old business of manoeuvre, concession and studied betrayal.[6]

Hare is concerned to show that despite the socialist impulse which emerged in Britain during the early 1940s ("it was the war itself which educated the working class towards the great Labour victory of 1945"),[7] the fundamental inequalities of pre-war society were preserved in the structure of the war machine. This made it, if not inevitable, then at least very likely that the nation would revert to its old ways. Somewhat paradoxically, the war simultaneously created the desire for change and ensured that it would not happen.

In 1939, most people who joined up would have done so for patriotic reasons. In their desire to defend their country, they would have given little thought to the fact that the war was an opportunity to build a better society for themselves and their descendants. This passivity meant that they were simply fighting to preserve a bad system from an even worse one. Things did not remain this way, however. J. B. Priestley, who travelled extensively in Britain during the war, wrote that "in hotels, camps, factory canteens, hostels, railway trains, bars, restaurants, I listened and talked and argued. Topic Number One was probably the state of the war at the particular time; but Topic Number Two, running Number One very close, was always the New World

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6. Angus Calder, *The People's War* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1969), p. 18.
7. Hare, "Introduction," p. 12.

after the war. What could we do to bring our economic and social system nearer to justice and security and decency? That was the great question . . ."[8]

By late 1941 or early 1942, Fennel could comment about Archie, "the Celtic race, you know: a cloven-hoofed people. They do seem to be fighting quite a different war."[9] But he is mistaken: the difference is not one of race, but of class.[10] What makes Archie seem foreign is that he comes from the Clyde, a militant working class area of Glasgow. His statement, "this house is the war"(121), shows that Wendlesham is the site of the continuing class struggle within Britain. He does not belong to the war that Fennel and his Oxbridge cronies are fighting, because he has only a very lowly position in the order which they are trying to defend. Archie represents the huge number of people who started fighting a battle on a second front, a class war amidst a world war. He is not entirely typical, however, because coming from the Red Clyde he already has good reason to distrust the people who run the country. For many other people, the war increased class consciousness while diminishing the social importance of class divisions.

One reason for this was that "the war effort . . . hurled together people of different social backgrounds in a series of massive upheavals caused by bombing, conscription, and the migration of workers to new centres of war industry."[11] In such circumstances, the formal rituals of class seemed less important. The propaganda unit in *Licking Hitler,* containing as it does the whole social spectrum, exemplifies this increased mobility: Archie grew up in working-class poverty, Eileen Graham is "lower-middle-class"(94), while Anna's uncle is Second Sea Lord at the Admiralty. Fennel and Langley come somewhere between these extremes. All the characters are forced to get along together as best they can, and while the class distinctions are always hovering in the background they are ameliorated to some extent.

The war also reduced the traditional links between social station and occupation, as the whole population was mobilised into the work-force. There were greater opportunities for people to find jobs outside those which their station would traditionally have allowed. Archie may have fought his way on to the journalistic staff of one of the national dailies, but he could never have become the editor, no matter

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8. Paul Addison, *The Road to 1945* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975), p. 162.
9. David Hare, *Licking Hitler*, in *The History Plays*, p. 115. All further references to this work appear in the text. As I have been unable to find a copy of the film, I do not know how far it differs from the published text.
10. In 1844, Engels wrote that "the working classes have become a race apart from the English bourgeoisie. The middle classes have more in common with every other nation in the world than with the proletariat which lives on their own doorsteps. The workers differ from the middle classes in speech, in thoughts and ideas, in customs, morals, politics and religion. They are two quite different nations, as unlike as if they were differentiated by race." *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1971), p. 139.
11. Addison, p. 130.

how talented he was. At Wendlesham, though, he is the brains of the Research Unit, and is given almost complete freedom.

Alongside this discovery that differences in station were not "natural" went a recognition of the injustice of the pre-war system, and anger that much of this injustice persisted. This was heightened by the home propaganda machine; its emphasis on the equality of sacrifice made people resent the fact that those who had been privileged in the past were still privileged:

> There is growing evidence of a feeling among certain sections of the public that 'everything is not fair and equal and that therefore our sacrifices are not worthwhile.' In particular, there is some belief that the rich are less hit by rationing than 'ordinary people'. . .[12]

People who would not have objected to social inequality in the 1930s were angry that the upper classes did not seem to be pulling their weight during the crisis. Archie voices the feelings of many when he ironically farewells Lord Minton, the owner of the requisitioned country house where the unit is going to set up its activities:

> Tell him we appreciate his sacrifice. Having to spend the rest of the war in that squalid wee single end in Eaton Square. (95)

The bitterness of this — Eaton Square is one of London's more fashionable areas — is symptomatic of a bitterness shared by large sections of the community against those who had managed to preserve their standard of living in spite of the rationing. In this short scene, Hare both undermines the myth of a totally united nation and accounts for the post-war determination to create an equal society.

Unfortunately, however, this determination came to naught. Using the metaphor of the country house, Hare shows that the war effort was destined to reproduce injustice and inequality, because the chain of command within war-time society reflected the old inequalities. Initially, the war was regarded by those in charge as an unpleasant interlude, but not one which they had any chance of losing, nor one which would radically alter their lives:

> FENNEL: I suppose you'd been hoping to represent your country.
> LANGLEY: That's right. I was aiming for the 1940 Olympics.
> FENNEL: But you still have your blue?
> LANGLEY: Half-blue.
> FENNEL: Fencing is a half-blue?
> LANGLEY: That's right. But I'm still hoping for national honour. I mean, after the war. (99)

Wendlesham's power structure reflects that of the nation as a whole and, as this scene shows, it is still riddled with privilege:

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12. Addison, p. 161.

> *The Unit sits round a large dinner table, overhung with chandeliers. The* OLDER MAID *dollops mashed potato on to each plate as the* YOUNG MAID *passes with an ashet on which sits a piece of pork luncheon meat in the shape of a tin. She puts it down at the head of the table, and as the top seat is unoccupied,* ARCHIE *rises and gravely begins to carve the luncheon meat.* (99-100)

While London is recovering from the Blitz, the people at Wendlesham are preserving the old order as well as they can. They may only have luncheon meat instead of a roast, but there are still maids to serve it.

Archie's ambivalent position within the unit is shown by the fact that he rises to carve the joint, traditionally the task of the master of the household, only because Langley is absent. Similarly, the working class became powerful only because of the exceptional circumstances. Calder writes that morale was all important during the war: "What the people demanded, they must now be given."[13] But as soon as Langley returns to take his "rightful" seat at the head of the table, Archie will lose his temporary authority. And when peace returned many of the concessions won by the workers were gradually whittled away. The shift in the power structure was more illusory than real.

Hare reinforces his case by showing that the British war effort was not only unequal, but immoral as well. There is not necessarily a causal connection between the two; the British could have allowed inequality in their own country without acting immorally abroad. But the *Boy's Own* picture of the Allies as the "good guys" fighting evil overseas encourages the view that they would never have allowed evil to persist at home. By having a terrible enemy without, the enemy within becomes less apparent, and the myth of Britain's peaceful revolution becomes easier to sustain.

Hare's point is that although the British never committed atrocities on the same scale as the Nazis, the difference between them was not as great as they liked to believe.[14] Hare deliberately confuses the two sides at the start of the play; the first words we hear are Archie defending Hitler from the sycophants who surround him and, before we are told anything about the propaganda unit, Archie hangs a portrait of Goebbels in the study of their very English country house. This comparison continues later, when Langley praises the efforts of "that great genius Joseph Goebbels"(123). His respect for a fellow professional suggests that he has much in common with the German propagandist:

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13. Calder, p. 18.

14. Two examples of this are the Dresden fire-raids, which were far worse than anything the English experienced in the Blitz, and the forced "repatriation" of over two million Russians after the war. The Allies knew that many of them would be murdered by Stalin, so this was genocide even if they did not actually pull the trigger.

> Now if you want to tell me that you can't draft that broadcast, then you had best return to your country estate, because we have as much duty to assist our side as he [Goebbels] has his. And we must bring to it the same vigour, the same passion, the same intelligence that he has brought to his. And if this involves throwing a great trail of aniseed across Europe, if it means covering the whole continent in obloquy and filth . . . then that is what we shall do. (123)

Langley's admission that he is willing to go to almost any lengths to win the war seriously undermines Britain's claims to be morally upright.

Nor is Langley alone in his ruthlessness. Archie hits upon a brilliant plan to support Germany's invasion of Russia, an invasion which they all know is military madness:

> Otto says the real enemy of Germany has always been Bolshevism. And now the army is getting a chance to begin its real fight. But. It is hard to fight Bolshevism abroad, when there are known Bolsheviks inside the Nazi Party. So. The loyal German is happy to die in Russia, but he is not happy if there is any evidence of subversion at home. And anybody . . . anybody at all who for whatever reason dares to oppose the Russian venture, or fails to support it with every sinew of their body is by definition . . . a Bolshevik. . . . Do y'see, everybody? Red-baiting! . . . Anyone who speaks out is branded as a Bolshevik. Criticism silenced. Millions die.
>
> Well? Is that no' what ye want? (108)

Although Langley is initially horrified, this is indeed what he wants — or rather, it is what he is prepared to accept, in order to win the war on his terms. Issues of right and wrong have ceased to be relevant.

So Britain's posture as the knight in shining armour is mere window-dressing. This obviously does not mean, however, that the whole country lost its moral perspective. Most people were relatively immune from the worst excesses of the military and the politicians. Again, Wendlesham acts as a microcosm of the nation in this regard. Fennel tells the inhabitants that they will be completely isolated:

> I am your only contact with the world outside and I don't expect to visit you very often. I'm afraid you will know very little about the success or failure of your work. You are throwing stones into a pond which is a very long way away. And there will be almost no ripples. So your job must be to keep your heads down and just . . .

> keep at it, even though you'll have almost no idea of the effect you're having. (98)

Only towards the end, when Eileen's brother is killed in Singapore, does the real world interrupt their quarantine. Eileen becomes "hysterical with grief"(120), screaming about the callousness of the unit's activities. Anna consistently challenges their aims and methods, but she is no more than a voice crying in the wilderness.

## II

Just in case his audience are still not convinced that the myth that Britain became a model society during the war is false, Hare offers a third piece of evidence against it. Class distinctions are not the only forms of discrimination present in *Licking Hitler*. Hare is also interested in the effect which the war had on the status and expectations of women. There are definite parallels between the development of these two power structures in the 1940s. In both cases, the oppressed were persuaded that there was a chance of improving their lot, and in both cases the chance went begging. It is easier to prove this of the patriarchy than it is of the class system; the Attlee government did introduce a number of social reforms, but sexism is harder to legislate against than economic inequality, so it remained firmly entrenched.

Mobilisation brought women out of the home and into the work-force in their thousands, forcing them to learn practical skills which they had never needed before. This was often quite a shock, both for the working class women who worked in the munitions factories and for pampered young women like Anna who were not bred for anything other than marriage:

> I literally didn't know there was such a thing as an electricity bill. I was sheltered, I suppose. Where we live we just always left the lights on. I assumed the electricity just came . . . it just came and you paid your taxes and you got your light. Then the other day I was talking to Eileen and she said electricity prices had risen, and I said, you mean, you have to pay? For what you use? You have to pay? Gas, electricity, water. It had never occurred to me. (112)

She wastes a whole week's ration in her first inept attempts to make tea, but within a few months has progressed to cooking a successful soufflé. Small beginnings, but after the war she is able to find a career, first as an advertiser and later as a researcher for the Labour Party. Eileen progresses from secretary to the "President of the Guild of British Businesswomen"(126). This expansion of their horizons also made many other women aware that being a housewife and mother was not necessarily all that they were fit for.

Increased expectations did not mean that much had changed, however. Although thousands of women were mobilised into the war effort, their position was still far below that of men. As Calder writes, "endless repetition of the same unskilled or semi-skilled task, of the kind which most women were given in war industry, was hardly emancipation."[15] This incident shows the bigotry which they were up against:

> . . . the extent to which female inequality was taken for granted was illustrated in the spring of 1944, in a row over the position of woman teachers, who quite clearly did exactly the same jobs, for the same hours, as men, and had the same qualifications. The House of Commons voted in favour of amending R. A. Butler's new Education Bill to give them equal pay. Churchill denounced this impertinence, and the Commons, called on for a vote of confidence, sheepishly revoked their decision.[16]

Women met resistance from the unions, their pay rates were lower, and after the war most of them were kicked straight out of their jobs and back into the home, to re-establish the "natural order" of the sexes. At the Unit, it is no accident that Eileen and Anna come at the bottom of the pecking order. The only people lower are prisoners, the interned Germans who read the scripts on the air.

The first montage sequence in the play demonstrates the limits of the new egalitarianism. Idyllic scenes are juxtaposed with images of the changes which the war has forced on that genteel society:

> ARCHIE *standing watching the rain coming down outside the window;* ALLARDYCE *looking regretfully away as* KARL *blunders through another broadcast;* ANNA *and* EILEEN *laughing together as* EILEEN *elaborately shows* ANNA *how to make a cup of tea;* LANGLEY *and* ALLARDYCE *playing croquet on the lawn as* EILEEN *and* ANNA *sit watching.* LOTTERBY *stands behind them and commentates. Long cool drinks are being sipped;* ANNA *before she goes to bed putting the chair against her door.* (106)

While the Unit throws "a great trail of aniseed across Europe"(123), a sheltered upper class woman is forced to come down from her ivory tower and learn a few practical skills. Langley and Allardyce, however, act as if nothing has changed. The women are still portrayed either as menials, passive (and possibly admiring) onlookers, or as victims of more direct forms of male brutality.

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15. Calder, p. 401.
16. Calder, pp. 403-04.

An even clearer example from Wendlesham is Archie's final act of aggression towards Anna, her wrongful dismissal for sexual harassment. This is a classic case of male conspiracy:

> There has been a complaint about you. From Maclean. He spoke to me this morning. Your German is good and so is your application. But he feels from the start you have tried to compromise him. I put it another way. You have tried unsuccessfully to get him to sleep with you. Please. There is the question of legality — your age. Also Maclean knows something of your background, your family, how little you know of the world, and felt to take advantage would be indefensible. And he has come to feel that the pressure is now intolerable and rather than have to upset you in person, he has asked me to request you to resign. (123)

Langley has no illusions about Archie — he did not disagree when Fennel called him a "savage"(115) — but because Archie is more important than Anna in the spreading of black propaganda, he must pretend to believe his story. He makes his position plain when he says, "I don't care if it's true. You have unbalanced one of our most gifted writers. That is unforgivable"(123). Since men were almost always professionally dominant, in such situations the woman would always have lost.

So despite the changes which did take place during the war in the status and consciousness of men and women of all classes, the old order remained strong. The early 1940s were poised between the "socialist" forces which gave rise to the welfare state, and the reactionary forces which wanted to return to the 1930s. Popular history suggests that the scales were weighted in favour of the former. This continued belief in the satisfaction of the ideals of the forties is often used to support claims for contemporary Britain's equality and moral probity. By showing that the imbalance was actually in the other direction, towards reaction rather than progress, Hare wants to persuade people that the changes, while important, were less radical than they appeared. He also wants to remind his audience that this myth said nothing about the oppression of women, so that even if it were true half the population would still be disadvantaged.

## III

The history lesson which Hare provides is interesting, but it is not the most important aspect of the play. The slant of ideology in Britain has shifted, so that egalitarian speechifying is less popular than it used to be. Hare writes that this ideological shift took place mainly during the 1970s:

> In the last days of the Empire, English capitalism still dressed in a bespoke philosophy of service and intended civilization. But now [the early seventies] politicians were ready to stand on a platform of bad-tempered self-interest, with only the most formal claims on the electorate's higher feelings.[17]

This means that his first purpose, that of undermining the historical belief that the war created an equal society, is less urgent than it once was.

In a decade in which Howard Brenton wrote *The Churchill Play* and David Edgar wrote *Destiny* — both very aggressive plays dealing with the resurgence of "fascism" in Britain — Hare's concern with egalitarianism sounds a little out of date. But *Licking Hitler* is not hopelessly anachronistic, because when the dominant form of ideology changes, the old one does not necessarily disappear. Since egalitarian ideology is no longer the main form of hegemonic control it is less relevant on the social level, but the psychological inertia which causes people to continue to believe in ideas long after the conditions which gave rise to them have gone means that it is still important at an *individual* level. Social myths become introjected into each individual's psyche, often causing severe damage. Hare is less concerned with showing Britain's inequality in general terms than with showing the adverse effects which the myth that it is an ideal society (and other such false beliefs) can have on the people who hold them.

The problems faced by the main characters are caused by what Anna calls the "national habit of lying"(128). This is less a matter of deceiving others than one of *self*-deception. Hare writes that "the story is not finished until you see that years later both Anna Seaton and Archie Maclean are trapped in myths about their own past from which they seem unwilling to escape."[18] They represent the two extremes of optimism and pessimism about the possibility of change, both of which are inadequate. They also illustrate the way that the two power structures of capitalism and the patriarchy interact. Archie's worries are caused by the ideology of the class system, but his defence takes the form, in part at least, of oppressing women. Anna, by contrast, is troubled mainly by the ideology of the patriarchy, with variations caused by the war-time propaganda of social reform.

Archie is one of Hare's nastiest characters, but his nastiness is caused partly, though not entirely, by his own self-loathing. Because of his background he nurses a strong class hatred, shown by a conversation he has with Anna when she first arrives at Wendlesham:

> ARCHIE: Who vetted you?

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17. Hare, "Introduction," p. 10.
18. Hare, "Introduction," p. 13.

ANNA: Naval Intelligence. My uncle is Second Sea Lord at the Admiralty.

ARCHIE: I see.

ANNA: I also have a cousin who's high-up in . . .

ARCHIE: Och yes, I can imagine.

Well, there's nothing for you yet. But we do need somebody to make the tea. (97)

On the other hand, he is fatalistic about the future; while most people are sure that there will be a better world after the war, he is gripped by a sense of tremendous futility:

I set maself the task. Get through the war. Just get through it, that's all. Put it no higher than that. Accept it. Endure it. But don't think, because if you begin to think, it'll all come apart in your hands. So. Let's all have the time of our lives not bothering to think about a bloody thing. Just . . . get on with it. This house is the war. And I'd rather be anywhere, I'd rather be in France, I'd rather be in the desert, I'd rather be in a Wellington over Berlin, anywhere but here with you and your people in this bloody awful English house . . . but I shall spend it here. (121)

There is an irreconcilable contradiction between his convictions that change *ought* to come and that it will *not* come, and this contradiction tears him apart. In peace time, when there is usually little hope of immediate social change, fatalism is easily sustainable. Archie would be able to do nothing quite happily. But when everyone else is talking about building a better world after the war, his fatalism seems like misanthropy or moral cowardice. So Archie believes that change is not going to happen, but he detests himself for not trying to *make* it happen, as his conscience tells him he should be doing.

With hindsight, his pessimism may look like prescience. In the letter which she writes to him over twenty-five years later, Anna claims that he was much more clear-sighted than the rest of them about the true nature of the war. Certainly, he had few illusions about Britain's role as defender of all that was decent in the world. He sees the war as being to protect the interests of the country house élite, so thinks that it has little to do with him. Yet despite his awareness of the injustice of British society, and of the determination of the ruling class to preserve this injustice, he makes absolutely no effort to change anything. Instead, he spends the whole play trying to hide from his own sense of failure, by indulging in two common forms of displacement.

One of these is taking out his frustrations on the people who are subordinate to him, Anna and Eileen. They illustrate the fact that women have to cope not only with

their own social and economic inferiority; that of their men is placed on their shoulders as well:

> There seems to be general agreement that frustration or stress in a man's life is one of the major reasons he will beat his spouse. Most often these frustrations have little to do with the woman involved but may be related to work, money, interpersonal relationships outside of the home, or parenting pressures. The woman simply becomes the target of his violent explosion. Frustration may be a result of differences between the man's expectations of himself and the reality of his life.[19]

Archie's misogyny is probably a result of his working-class background, but it is rendered more extreme by his hatred of himself. This exchange with Anna shortly after Eileen's departure is typical of his emotional inadequacy:

> ANNA: You should have said goodbye to her.
>
> ARCHIE: What?
>
> ANNA: That was the decent thing to do.
>
> ARCHIE: There's a broadcast here I've just completed. I want it transmitted as fast as possible. You'll also have to take on Eileen's secretarial tasks. Get right down to it in the morning, will you? (121)

First, he cannot bring himself to show any sympathy to someone with whom he has worked for several months when her brother dies. Then, because Anna has the effrontery to criticise his behaviour, he tries to punish her by loading her with extra duties.

It is also no accident that he treats Anna worse than he treats Eileen. It infuriates him that Anna is socially superior to him, so he is especially vicious in emphasising his professional dominance. It is obvious that she used her connections to get a job in Political Warfare, instead of working in a factory or becoming a Land Girl, as a poorer woman, without influential friends, would have had to do. Archie resents such privilege, and immediately asserts his authority in one of the few ways he can, by telling her to make the tea, the lowest job he can think of. His frustration also explains, though cannot excuse, the way he sexually abuses Anna — raping her is the clearest assertion of superiority he could make.

Frustration alone, however, is not enough to account for why he suddenly forces her to leave at the end of the play. Anna has indeed compromised him, as he tells Langley she has tried to do, but not in the sexual sense. Instead, she makes him

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19. Donna M. Moore, *Battered Women* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1979), p. 16.

face his own spinelessness by pointing out that his combination of class hatred and fatalism is self-defeating:

> Strange thing; as if to suffer and say nothing were clever. As if to do this degrading work were clever. As if that were clever. (122)

She has shown him that he has sold out, that his cynicism is just a mask for him to hide behind. Once she becomes a reminder of his own moral weakness, rather than just someone he can enjoy humiliating, he has to get rid of her for his own peace of mind.

Archie's other form of displacement is work. He knows that the war is not being fought for his benefit, but he gradually changes from reluctant acquiescence in the vicious propaganda game to enthusiastic participation:

> . . . it becomes clear that Archie is abandoning his sardonic detachment, that he is investing the story with literary significance, that he is, in short, taking himself and his work seriously.[20]

But when Langley receives proof that the rumours they are broadcasting are having some effect, and plans to show it to Archie, Anna tells him that "he wouldn't want to know. It would spoil the game"(116). By becoming involved in the drive to defeat Germany, Archie can forget that he has opted out of the struggle to make Britain a better place to live. His passion for spreading "obloquy and filth"(123) is not the sign of a hatred of Germans or of his fellow creatures. Although he cannot admit that he enjoys his work, he is really glad to have something to keep him busy so that he will not have time to think about anything else. Richard Johnstone is right when he notes that "Archie sees himself as having betrayed his working-class origins," but wrong when he goes on to observe that "he despises his task, yet is unable to prevent his slow and relentless absorption in it."[21] Archie allows the job to absorb him only because it enables him to forget his feeling that he is a traitor to his class.

He continues this displacement after the war, though in a slightly different form. This is shown by the final section of the play, in which the "objective" voice of the narrator gives a damning account of his lack of integrity as a director. Here is the voice-over to a shot from one of his films of a runaway car speeding off the end of a pier into the water:

> He became known in the fifties for his award-winning feature films . . . which he both wrote and directed. The most famous example is *A Kind of Life*, a loving and lyrical evocation of his own childhood in Glasgow. But his most recent work starring some of

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20. Richard Johnstone, "Television Drama and the People's War: David Hare's *Licking Hitler*, Ian McEwan's *The Imitation Game* and Trevor Griffith's *Country*," *Modern Drama*, 28, No. 2 (June, 1985), p. 193.
21. Johnstone, p. 192.

> Hollywood's best loved names . . . has commanded little of the same critical attention or respect. (126)

This is obviously a polite account of how Archie has sold out to commercial moviedom.

But in fact he had lost his credibility long before then, and even his "loving and lyrical evocation of his own childhood" is a romantic invention:

> Having travelled to see Maclean's latest film at a seaside Odeon, she [Anna] was driven to write to him for the first time since 1942, complaining of the falseness of his films, the way they sentimentalized what she knew to be his appalling childhood and lamenting, in sum, the films' lack of political direction. (127)

This is a natural development of his war-time occupation. He was playing games which had no connection to reality then, and he is still doing so. By editing out all the hardship from the memories of his childhood, he is attempting to persuade himself that he has nothing to be angry about, and therefore that he has not betrayed anything.

## IV

Archie's view of the world is "realistic," in the sense that his pessimism turns out to be justified, but it prevents him from acting in accordance with his principles. He suffers from the contradiction between his actions and the dictates of his conscience. Anna, on the other hand, is morally upright but incredibly naïve. Hare writes that "Anna, however flawed, *is* the conscience of the play."[22] She begins the play much as Miranda ends hers, exclaiming, "O brave new world,/ That has such people in't!" She later admits that she was an innocent, "born into a class and at a time that protected me from even a chance acquaintance with the world"(127). Her problem is therefore the contradiction between *her* expectations of the world and those of the rest of society. She assumes that everyone will act according to their ideals, as she does, and is horribly disillusioned to discover that this is not the case. Since the perceptions of the majority constitute "reality," she suffers because her grasp on this reality is very tenuous.

The innocent protagonist is a common feature of satire and other types of political literature, because he or she can ask all sorts of awkward questions, as Anna does when she and Eileen are searching through letters looking for material to use in their broadcasts:

> ANNA: Who wrote them?
>
> EILEEN: Just ordinary people in Germany writing to their relatives in the States.

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22. Hare, "Introduction," p. 13.

ANNA: I didn't know they were allowed to.

EILEEN: Why not? America's neutral.

ANNA: Then how did we get hold of them?

EILEEN: Not that neutral, apparently. (112)

As Anna becomes educated in the ways of the world, so does the audience. Like Hare, she takes a "less playful view of the unit's activities than he [Delmer] had done."[23] Just before she leaves, while she is reading one of Archie's scripts, the stage direction says that "*her face is dead*"(122).

In general, then, the audience is asked to identify with Anna throughout the play. But how can we respect a woman who worships a man who broke into her room and raped her? And *why* does she worship him, when he is obviously a raving misogynist? When Eileen asks her about her affair with Archie, she admits that "I don't know what he thinks about anything. We've never had a conversation. We just have a thing"(120). This is not a very secure basis for a relationship, yet at the end of the play she writes to him, saying, "I loved you then and I love you now. For thirty years you have been the beat of my heart"(128). What is even odder is that Anna does not fit any of the usual patterns of violence by men against women. She is not *physically* helpless, nor is she economically or emotionally dependent on him; when he first attacks her they hardly know each other.

After the first time that Archie crashes into her bedroom and collapses in a drunken stupor at the foot of her bed, she starts barring the door each night by placing a chair against it. One evening, however, she and Eileen have this conversation on the stairs:

ANNA: Why does he drink so much?

EILEEN: I don't know. Fleet Street, I suppose. They all do.

ANNA: Was he a journalist?

EILEEN: By the time the war came he was on one of the big national dailies. Fought his way up.

ANNA: From?

EILEEN: Poverty. Terrible. He comes from Glasgow, from the Red Clyde. You must know that.

ANNA: I don't know anything. (111)

This is immediately followed by the shot of her picking up the chair and then changing her mind. The juxtaposition indicates that her decision to allow Archie in is directly caused by what Eileen has told her. The same night, he comes in and rapes her. By leaving the door unbarred, she is virtually consenting to the attack. Clearly she does not want to be raped, so why does she deliberately place herself in a situation where

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23. Hare, "Introduction," p. 13.

she knows that she probably will be, particularly when she could easily have prevented it?

Anna is suffering from what Del Martin calls the "oh-but-he-needs-me" syndrome, which is one reason why women stay in destructive, even dangerous, relationships:

> A woman who takes her role as nurturer very seriously will probably believe — as she has been conditioned to believe — that she is not "complete" unless she is caring for another person. She may easily conclude that the more violent her husband is, the sicker he really is and thus the more he needs her.[24]

Ignore the fact that they are not married, and for "sicker" substitute "more frustrated, and therefore more noble," and we have a reasonable explanation of why Anna accepts Archie. She pities his past and respects his achievement. She decides that he is a tormented genius whose class position does not allow him to give full expression to his talents. Even as she is fetching Dettol for the cuts to her legs, she is telling Langley and Fennel that "he just seems a very extraordinary man to me"(115). This is an overly charitable interpretation of his character, but it does allow her to offer herself to him as a kind of mother/sacrifice. Further mistreatment is merely confirmation of his torment, and therefore, by the same twisted logic, of his nobility and of his need for her. She closes this bizarre syllogism with, "the more he needs me the more I love him."[25]

This syndrome is a common feature of patriarchal society, easily surviving the ideological upheaval which war brings. But Anna only allows herself to become Archie's victim in the first place because of the ideology of class present during the war. This exemplifies the way that the two forms of ideology, class-based and patriarchal, feed off each other. Her ignorance allows her to accept at face value the claims of the home propaganda machine, which has been stressing how admirable the English character is (in films such as *London can Take It*).[26] In particular, she has a tendency to romanticise the working class. This is not uncommon among newly awakened idealists who, in their fervent and genuine desire for a better deal for the oppressed, can often imagine them to be much better than they really are. While the resurgence of leftist ideas during the war was undoubtedly a good thing in many ways, it was destructive in her case because of her almost total naïvety. Patriarchal ideology is the *main* cause of Anna's rape, in that it tells Archie that it is all right for him to do it and Anna that she should tolerate it, but her rape is *indirectly* caused by the war-time

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24. Del Martin, *Battered Wives* (San Fransisco: Volcano Press, 1981), p. 82.
25. Martin, p. 82. Martin calls this "a peculiar but very common permutation of marital affection."
26. Marion Yass, *This is your War; Home Front Propaganda in the Second World War* (London: Public Record Office, 1983), p. 33.

idealism about the destruction of the class system, since if it were not for that she would never have let Archie near her.

When she first arrives at Wendlesham she has a conversation with her teddy bear, asking him which side of the bed he wants. Later, in the second montage sequence, we see a shot of the teddy sitting on a high shelf next to a row of Archie's empty whisky bottles. This symbolises Anna's loss of innocence. She never loses it entirely, however, because her tendency to believe the best of people, despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, consigns her to a kind of ideological Never-Never-Land. Her later life is a story of progressive disillusionment:

> Entered advertising in 1946 where she remained for ten years, increasingly distressed at the compromises forced on her by her profession. In 1956 she resigned and announced her intention to live an honest life. . . . She told her husband she was having an affair with another man, and could no longer bear the untruths of adultery. Her husband left her. . . . She became a full-time researcher for the Labour Party, until she left during the Vietnam demonstrations and went to live with a young unmarried mother in Wales. (126-127)[27]

This is a rapid foreshadowing of a theme which is very important in *Plenty*, that of the difficulty of holding war-time ideals in peace-time society. Anna expects that other people will be as idealistic and as honest as she is, but discovers that "lying" is normal practice in the business world, people's personal lives and in politics. In her search for fellow idealists she moves initially to the Labour Party, which in her youth had been in the forefront of the fight for justice, only to find it infested with people like John Fennel, whose background as head of a secretive and discriminatory country house establishment suggests that he would be more at home with the Conservatives. Finally, she opts out of organised politics altogether.

This does not mean that she has exchanged her earlier false consciousness for a clearer vision of society, however, because despite her much wider (and extremely unpleasant) experience, she still completely misinterprets Archie. She writes to him, "I have remembered the one lie you told to make me go away. And I now at last have come to understand why you told it"(128). She has persuaded herself that the cause of "the shame and anger I saw in you"(127-28) was his recognition that the war was pointless, because it would bring no benefits to the common people of Britain:

> In retrospect what you sensed then has become blindingly clear to the rest of us: that whereas we knew exactly what we were fighting

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27. I have omitted part of this quotation, which reads, "after a period of lavish promiscuity she suffered an infected womb and an enforced hysterectomy"(127). I will discuss this in Chapter 4.

> against, none of us had the whisper of an idea as to what we were fighting for. (128)

This reinforces her image of him as a working class hero. In fact, though, Anna is quite wrong to suggest that no one knew what they were fighting for — the idealism may have been vague and impractical, but it was very strong. Archie was the one who did not know what he was fighting for; he was not too concerned about the war with the Germans, but unlike thousands of other people he was not fighting for a better Britain either. His anger was directed not at the futility of the war, nor at the stupidity of those who had involved them in it, but at himself. He was ashamed of his cowardice in opting out of the other war which was going on at the same time, the battle for a fairer society in which the privilege of places like Wendlesham would disappear.

So for the rest of her life Anna, like Archie, is trapped in a false vision of the world which was generated in her youth. This is not her fault, because there is no way that the contradiction between practical and moral imperatives — that is, between how people *ought* to behave and how they are *forced* to act in order to make a living — can be resolved in the society in which she lives. Instead of recognising this contradiction, however, she complains about the moral decay of contemporary Britain:

> Over the years I have watched the steady impoverishment of the people's ideals, their loss of faith, the lying, the daily inveterate lying, the thirty-year-old deep corrosive national habit of lying . . . (128)

This is the important difference between Anna and Archie. He is unhappy because his lack of idealism, acquired before the war, is inappropriate for a war-time world. Her problem is that her idealism, acquired *during* the war, is inappropriate afterwards. They are both extremists: Archie's fatalism is more realistic than Anna's optimism, but does not achieve anything, while her principles are useless because they are not matched with a clear vision of how society works.

Dramatically, this final section, which traces the lives of the characters after the war, is rather clumsy. Hare writes that "given the chance again, I would stomp through the years with less heavy boots."[28] Thematically, however, it is vital for two reasons. First, it shows that the problems which Anna and Archie face are not momentary crises caused by the war, but are ghosts which will haunt them for the rest of their lives. This makes it relevant to 1978, because if people can identify with elements of Anna's or Archie's experiences, they may be able to recognise the ideological contradictions which have plagued their own lives. It is not enough to

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[28]. Hare, "Introduction," p. 13.

know that these social myths about the country's past exist and that they are false; we must also know the damage that they do.

The second function of the end of the play is to show that Anna and Archie are not isolated cases. The narrator says that "many of the most brilliant men from the Propaganda and Intelligence Services went on to careers in public life, in Parliament, Fleet Street, the universities and the BBC"(125). John Fennel has a successful political career, Will Langley's novels "helped to establish a genre notable for its sustained passages of sexuality and violence"(125), and Eileen Graham "started a chain of employment agencies specializing in temporary secretaries"(125-26). By expanding the final section to include the other characters as well, Hare is attempting to ensure that the viewers do not see *Licking Hitler* simply as a perverse love story, with no relation to their own lives. This is not entirely successful, however, because while we may be supposed to regard a Labour MP and a writer of pulp fiction as unfortunates who have wasted their talents, there is no indication that these other characters are not entirely satisfied with their lot.

## Chapter 3
## The age of Reason: *Plenty*

*Plenty* was written only a few months after *Licking Hitler* in 1978, and there is considerable overlap between the two plays. As Hare says, they are "made up of similar elements." He goes on to observe, however, that they have "very different emphases, one concentrating on the war, the other on the peace."[1] In a sense, *Plenty* is simply the expanded version of the final section of the earlier play. Both plays examine the reasons for the failure of the idealism created by the war, and the effects of capitalist and patriarchal ideology on individuals in post-war society. Again, Hare tries to show that it is not only the obviously disadvantaged who are victims of the unequal structure of modern Britain, but that those who seem to benefit from the system are also handicapped.

Like *Licking Hitler*, *Plenty* challenges the myth that the war created a just and equal society. In this play, however, Hare realises that the content of the myth has changed slightly, and therefore that its ideological function has changed also. In its original form, it aimed to persuade people that Britain was still enjoying the egalitarian fruits of the war-time revolution, and hence that change was unnecessary. By the 1970s, this was obviously not true, so a popular conception of the fifties as a time of peace and prosperity emerged; the revolution did succeed for a while, but has since been betrayed. This encourages a false nostalgia, as people who are unhappy with their lot can look back wistfully to that mythical Golden Age, and try to reverse those changes which they believe to be responsible for the decline, such as immigration from Asia and the Caribbean.

Hare undermines this reactionary nostalgia by showing the imperialist attitudes present during the 1940s and 50s. He asks the question: if the English had no conception of justice abroad, then how could they have any at home? He also demonstrates that one of the main reasons for the failure of the socialist impulse which emerged during the war was the ideology of reformism, which became the dominant ideology of the 1950s. Reformists claimed that many of capitalism's major problems had been overcome, and that those which remained could be solved through reforms alone, without interfering with the economic and political base of society.

Since the fifties were not nearly as perfect as some politicians liked to pretend, the gap between reformist ideology and reality was bound to create frustration, both for reformers and for the more perceptive, who wanted social change but who sensed the impossibility of trying to create a new order using the instruments which supported

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1. "Introduction," p. 15.

the old one. As we would expect, Hare illustrates this frustration with concrete examples. Darwin and Brock belong to the first group, Susan and Alice to the latter.

Hare writes that "increasingly in *Licking Hitler* and *Plenty* I found myself concerned with the cost of having a conscience. The clearest way I can describe *Plenty* is as a play about the cost of spending your whole life in dissent."[2] Susan Traherne knows that the system will never transform itself, but because it *seems* to be doing so well, she finds few sympathetic listeners to her call for radical change. Marcuse explains why:

> Under the conditions of a rising standard of living, non-conformity with the system itself appears to be socially useless, and the more so when it entails tangible economic and political disadvantages and threatens the smooth operation of the whole.[3]

Because the system seems to be the epitome of rationality, questioning it becomes a symptom of irrationality. Susan and Alice's bohemian life-style and outspoken criticism of the hypocrisy they see around them make them social outcasts, regarded at best as eccentric and at worst as insane. Leonard Darwin faces a similar problem, because he is an anachronism, who tries to apply the ideology of benevolent imperialism to a society which is in the process of losing both its Empire and its benevolence (if indeed it ever had any). Since he works *within* the system to try to achieve the sort of society he believes Britain can and should be, he is bound to be thwarted, and his devotion to his ideals, outdated as they are, costs him both his friends and his peace of mind.

Susan and Darwin are virtually destroyed by the difficulty of being in perpetual opposition, but Hare wants to show the members of his audience, who are presumably more moderate than these two characters, that they are caught in the same trap. The play is also about the cost of *not* spending your whole life in dissent. Raymond Brock is less idealistic than the others, believing, in his phlegmatic way, that the system which has worked so well for him can work for everyone else too. He shares their concern for people's welfare, but in an attenuated form, so he shares their problems, also in an attenuated form. In this far-from-passionate idealism he will be typical of most of the audience. Hare's point is that having a conscience, even a weak one, is a major source of grief in modern society, because its dictates are at odds with the practical requirements of our everyday living. The main focus of *Plenty* is therefore the same as that of *Licking Hitler*: the catastrophic psychological effects which the ideological contradictions in society can have on the individuals who introject them.

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2. "Introduction," pp. 13-14.
3. *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 2.

Susan illustrates not only the desire for justice between the *classes* which emerged during the war, however, but also the desire for *sexual* equality. Here she faces exactly the same problems; if democratic capitalism seems "rational," monogamy and all its romantic trappings appear "natural." This is perhaps the biggest cause of Susan's frustration. But the play does not just examine the oppression of *women* during the 1950s. It also considers the hidden oppression of men by the power structures which seem to act in their favour. The strategy is again to show the apparent beneficiaries of the existing system that they would be better off giving up their privilege. Hare's point is a simple one; the ideological monsters which have been invented to keep women "in their place" have turned against their masters, so that men are also suffering from the roles into which they are forced. In the long struggle to subordinate women, men have ended up suppressing many of their own feelings, so much so that emotional and sexual expression is very difficult for many of them.

## I

In *Licking Hitler* the terrible acts perpetrated by the propaganda unit in the name of goodness were used to show the immorality of the war machine. This is one reason for the failure of the revolution at home; imperialism, the idea that the British, and in particular the British ruling class, have a God-given right to decide how the rest of the world shall live. Imperialism rears its ugly head in several of Hare's plays. It is a minor theme in *Wetherby*, much more important in *Map of the World* and crucial in *Saigon: Year of the Cat* (although in this case it is American imperialism, not British). The dubious idea of "justice" inherent in these colonialist attitudes is made even clearer in *Plenty* than it was in *Licking Hitler*, because this time the injustice is directed at people who are supposedly Britain's allies, rather than at the "enemy."

The actions of the British who worked behind the lines in occupied France go some way towards explaining the failure of attempts at domestic reform. Lazar's speech to the French resistance worker who is trying to "steal" the arms which have been dropped by parachute, and which Lazar proceeds to reclaim at gun-point, reveals the total indifference on the part of the British to the feelings of the people they are supposed to be helping:

> Please tell your friends we're sorry. We do want to help. Mais parfois ce sont les Français mêmes qui le rendent difficile.[4]

This indicates a paternalistic concern for the welfare of the French, but makes it plain that the solution is going to be imposed from above. Lazar has no sympathy with the

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4. David Hare, *Plenty*, in *The History Plays*, p. 139. All further references to this work appear in the text.

Frenchman's claim that "il faut absolument que ce soit les Français qui déterminent notre avenir"(139).

This patronising attitude towards foreigners is also implicit in Darwin's notion of post-war "reconstruction," which implies an activity done *for* the people rather, than *by* the people:

> Reconstruction. Massive. Massive work of reconstruction. Jobs. Ideals. Marvellous. Marvellous time to be alive in Europe. No end of it. Roads to be built. People to be educated. Land to be tilled. Lots to get on with. (149)

Even idealists like Darwin never think of asking the people what they want; instead, they simply assume that they know what is best. As long as this arrogance persists, real change is impossible because, as Engels says, "no people oppressing other peoples can be free."[5] The point is that exactly the same thing was taking place inside Britain, where the people who were deciding what the *solution* should be were themselves part of the *problem.*

The promised revolution failed because the seeds of its defeat were present in the very war that gave it birth. The propaganda unit at Wendlesham in *Licking Hitler* showed that the war was about preserving the pre-war inequality. The French farmer who Susan meets in 1944 realises this, and does not join the celebrations after his area has been "liberated," because the end of the war will not make a great deal of difference to his life:

> Myself I work. A farmer. Like any other day. The Frenchman works or starves. He is the piss. The shit. The lowest of the low. (206)

He does concedes that it is a good thing that the British have won, as they are a less vindictive regime than the Germans, but he does so only reluctantly, as for him it is a philosophical issue which has little bearing on his own situation. Clearly, he regards as simply naïve Susan's claim that "things will quickly change. We have grown up. We will improve our world"(207). Having seen the rest of the play, the audience is likely to agree with him.

Although the desire for change was still strong after the war, the organs of government which were given the task of achieving that change were the same organs which had supported the old order. The public school nature of the civil service handicapped the Labour government's attempted reforms, because "higher civil servants in the countries of advanced capitalism may generally be expected to play a conservative role in the councils of the state, to reinforce the conservative propensities

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5. Quoted in Christopher Hill, "The English Civil War Interpreted by Marx and Engels," in *A Centenary of Marxism*, ed. Samuel Bernstein et al. (New York: Science and Society, 1948), p. 149.

of governments in which these propensities are already well developed, and to serve as an inhibiting element in regard to governments in which they are less pronounced."[6]

The character in *Plenty* who comes closest to this sort of reactionary Machiavel is Sir Andrew Charleson, Chief Clerk in the Foreign Office. He is determined to preserve his own position, and if that means avoiding everything which might be seen as threatening the *status quo*, every spark of initiative, then he is quite happy to do so. His inertia is both self-interested and class-interested; he finds the current state of affairs quite satisfactory, because it works well for him and his kind, so he would not want to change it, even if he could do so without damaging his career.

This smug cynicism undermines the efforts of genuine idealists like Darwin. But even if Charleson and his cronies had wanted change, they would not have been able to achieve it. A cow cannot give birth to a sheep, however much it wants to. A system which belongs to the past can only reproduce itself, even if it does so in hitherto unknown forms. It is genetically incapable of creating a society which does not contain its own assumptions and inequalities. The choice of Darwin's name is deliberate, because the fallacy in his picture of the world is that it assumes an inexorable, natural *evolution* towards a just society (although he does not use Darwinian theory to justify élitism, as Herbert Spencer and his followers did in the late Victorian period). The optimism inherent in this sort of reformism belongs in the eighteenth century, since it is clearly an Enlightenment phenomenon. Despite its evident falsity (for example, the profusion of wars since the "war to end all wars" in 1914-1918), it still retained a good deal of its ideological persuasiveness in the 1950s.

## II

So the basic structure of British society remained relatively unchanged after the war. What did change, though, was the prevailing ideology. In keeping with his interest in the way in which ideological contradictions within society are reflected in the minds of individuals, Hare examines the effects of this ideological shift, using different characters to illustrate different problems.

Much has been written about the demise of the British Empire after the war. As it became clear that Britain was no longer a super-power, the colonial attitudes of earlier times became inappropriate:

> . . . the post-imperial British policeman not only lacked credibility, in view of the existence of more powerful policemen round him, hostile to his pretensions, but perhaps, more importantly, lacked the old faith in his mission. He no longer believed that he had right

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6. Ralph Miliband, *The State in Capitalist Society* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), p. 120.

> overwhelmingly on his side. He had been educated for years into the belief that imperialism, the fact of power that made possible all his illusions, was dirty, exploitative and ignoble. He could no longer believe that he was acting from the loftiest, disinterested motives.[7]

One obvious response to this is that adopted by Charleson; to seek power for its own sake, without the moral garb with which it had previously been disguised. Such people tried hard to hold on to their former dominance, but because they had lost their unquestioned superiority, the paternalism which once accompanied this dominance was gone.

Leonard Darwin, on the other hand, is a relic of the colonial past who persists in an idealism which is no longer fashionable. This idealism is not entirely praiseworthy — for one thing, he is unconsciously racist, describing their Burmese visitor as "that appalling wog"(173) — but we cannot doubt his sincerity. He genuinely believes that what he represented was for the good of humanity. His obsession with the rituals of Empire make him a figure of fun to the younger generation; according to Susan, Brock "would not trust him to stick his prick into a bucket of lard"(157). In an earlier era, however, there would have been no contradiction between his beliefs and those of the rest of the population, and he would never have faced the crisis of faith which he experiences in 1956.

This crisis is caused by the invasion of the Suez Canal Zone by Israeli forces, with the collusion of the French and the British. What Brock says about the Prime Minister's self-interested reasons for attacking Egypt applies equally well to the other politicians, bureaucrats and military men who yearned for the good old days when Britain was one of the strongest nations in the world:

> Eden is weak. For years he has been weak. For years people have taunted him, why aren't you strong? Like Churchill? He goes round, he begins to think I must find somebody to be strong on. He finds Nasser. Now he'll show them. He does it to impress. (176)

Darwin's objection to the invasion is not that it demonstrates the strength of the old imperialist attitudes of gun-boat diplomacy, because he would have shared those attitudes, but that it is done furtively. Britain no longer has the courage to stand up for its own actions:

> Yes. I would have defended it, I wouldn't have minded how damn stupid it was. I would have defended it had it been honestly done.

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7. Robert Skidelsky, "Lessons of Suez," in *The Age of Affluence*, ed. Vernon Bogdanor and Robert Skidelsky (London: Macmillan, 1970), p. 188.

> But this time we are cowboys and when the English are the cowboys, then in truth I fear for the future of the globe. (176)

He would not object to stupidity, because stupidity does not necessarily compromise goodness, and he believes in the ultimate triumph of good and in the English as its standard-bearers. But when it becomes clear that Britain's claim to *moral* superiority is no longer tenable, that those who run the country are motivated by petty-mindedness and delusions of grandeur, he loses heart.

So Darwin is a victim of ideological change, caught in a vortex as society alters and he remains the same. Susan says that he lost a lot of his friends because "he spoke his mind over Suez. In public. He didn't hide his disgust. A lot of people never forgave him for that"(182). He resigns after the Suez debacle, and the juxtaposition of the scene in which the characters discuss the crisis and his funeral is a clear indication that it contributes directly to his death five years later. Like Anna Seaton, however, he never questions his own beliefs, interpreting the ideological shift which is going on around him as a moral decline in British society.

Darwin's problem is the contradiction between his personal beliefs and the dominant ideology. This is a *moral* contradiction; he believes that people like Charleson are not as good as they should be. Susan Traherne also believes that the system is immoral, though for different reasons. She faces two further problems, however, which make her position much more serious than Darwin's. For one thing, her personal code of ethics is still the "official" morality, in the sense that those in power continue to pay lip service to the ideals which she genuinely believes in and which millions of other people shared at the end of the war. This makes it harder to argue that things need to be changed, because those in power claim to be living up to the ideals of 1945, while really doing the exact opposite. Susan's plight is made even more difficult by the apparent rationality of the existing system, which purports to be the only logical means of assuring reasonable benefits for everyone. In Western society it is assumed that standards of reason are self-evident and therefore unchallengeable, and so political criticism outside narrowly defined limits seems lunatic.

Susan may seem an improbable hero, because she is one of Hare's least likeable characters. Her unhappier-than-thou attitude is sure to irritate the audience right from the start, so we are likely to applaud Brock when he challenges her claim to moral superiority:

> You don't think you wear your suffering a little heavily? This smart club of people you belong to who had a very bad war . . .
> I mean I know it must have put you on a different level from the rest of us . . . (147)

But her decline from youthful optimism, when she stands on a hillside in France on a beautiful summer afternoon at the end of the war and says, "there will be days and days and days like this"(207), to self-pity and bitterness is the point of the whole play. The tensions between her moral code on the one hand and society's fraudulent standards of morality and rationality on the other result in the confusion of her moral sense, as her early expectations of a better world are reduced to a barren attempt to "épater les bourgeois," and her youthful goodwill becomes destructiveness towards both herself and others. Her life is a story of progressive disillusionment, as the ideals of the war years are betrayed.

Susan tries to hold on to her ideals, which are closer to Anna's than Darwin's, but unlike Darwin is unable to do so in a pure form. Her moral confusion is shown most clearly at the time of the Suez crisis, when her hawkish comments seem very out of character for someone who knows how unpleasant war is:

> That's what they do before they drop a bomb. They send their targets notice in a telegram. Bombs tonight, evacuate the area. Now what does that indicate to you, M. Aung? . . . I'll tell you what it indicates to me. Bad conscience. They don't even have the guts to make a war any more. (177)

And the words which she uses to condemn Suez, "blunder," "folly," "fiasco," "international laughing stock"(173), contain no moral overtones. Her concern for the victims of the attack is non-existent; she would have been happier if there had been no telegram, and therefore more casualties.

Although Susan's anger still stems from its original source, it has become misdirected. Eventually, it ceases to be political at all, at least in the usual sense, and her targets become examples less of injustice than of bad taste. Her complaint about her job in the advertising agency reflects this antipathy towards the banality and superficiality of contemporary society:

> To produce what my masters call good copy, it is simply a question of pitching my intelligence low enough. Shutting my eyes and imagining what it's like to be very, very stupid. This is all the future holds for any of us. We will spend the next twenty years of our lives pretending to be thick. 'I'm sorry, Miss Traherne, we'd like to employ you, but unfortunately you are not stupid enough.' (166)

Similarly, she does not seriously believe that the invasion of the Canal Zone will be the "death-rattle of the ruling class"(173). Her protest has been reduced to tormenting her husband and his friends with her "psychiatric cabaret"(177).

This behaviour is extremely destructive, but Brock is unfair when he accuses her of deliberate malice:

> Your life is selfish, self-interested gain. That's the most charitable interpretation to hand. You claim to be protecting some personal ideal, always at a cost of almost infinite pain to everyone around you. You are selfish, brutish, unkind. Jealous of other people's happiness as well, determined to destroy other ways of happiness they find. (199)

Her attempt to further Brock's career shows that although she continually harasses him herself, she is still capable of some feeling for the people around her and of some altruistic acts, even if they are only heroic gestures. After threatening to shoot herself if he is not promoted, she explains, "I think you have destroyed my husband, you see"(194). She does not set out to hurt people, but finds that if she is to remain true to her principles she cannot avoid it. It is no wonder that she becomes confused when she discovers that "doing the right thing" causes pain to others.

By the end of the play Susan has been turned into a moral vegetable by the fact that attempts to be morally upright in an alienated society appear as wanton destructiveness. The limits of her compassion are illustrated most clearly by the contrast with Alice.[8] Throughout the fifties, Alice gives no sign that she shares Susan's moral dilemma. In fact, she seems to be a pure hedonist, whose main complaint in the whole play concerns the poor quality of the kief available in London. She realises that she is "simply out of my time"(197), but unlike Darwin and Susan, that is only because her time has not yet arrived, not because it is already passed. Yet when criticism of society does become possible again, it is Alice, and not Susan, who takes advantage of the change, telling Brock, "I think it may be time to do good"(197). On the weekend of the Aldermaston March in 1962 (often regarded as the start of the *youth* activism of the sixties, as opposed to the more sedate protests of the early CND), she is setting up a women's refuge, but Susan refuses to help, saying, "unmarried mothers. I don't think I'd get on"(134). Susan is liberal with money and possessions, but offers nothing of herself — her involvement is restricted to mere gestures, like her histrionics at the Foreign Office. Paradoxically, the fifteen years she has spent in perpetual and fruitless opposition to the moral inadequacies of her society have rendered her incapable of moral action when the opportunity does arise.

This, in Hare's eyes, is the real force of modern tragedy; not the never-ending wait for a Godot who does not exist, but the destruction of characters by social forces which they cannot even recognise. Susan's moral confusion must be understood, and her behaviour forgiven, by remembering the way in which she and the thousands who

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8. Alice really belongs in the sixties rather than the fifties. The fact that she is so far ahead of her time (that is, so atypical) suggests that her most important function in the play is to provide this contrast to Susan.

shared her hopes for the future were cheated after the war. Part of the problem is that while her optimism was once common, now she seems to be completely alone:

> The promised equalisation of 1945 had not come to nought — it had not come at all. The idealistic fervour at the end of the war had ebbed quickly, and had been replaced by a selfish inability to accept the rigours of rationing.[9]

It is not simply the fact that nothing has changed, however, which causes her distress, but that the ostensible rationality and moral probity of the system makes protest virtually impossible, as Marcuse has pointed out:

> Independence of thought, autonomy, and the right to political opposition are being deprived of their basic critical function in a society which seems increasingly capable of satisfying the needs of the individuals through the way in which it is organized. Such a society may justly demand acceptance of its principles and institutions, and reduce the opposition to the discussion and promotion of alternative policies *within* the status quo.[10]

In the immediate post-war years it seemed unreasonable to expect too much, since the economy needed time to recover. And in the boom years of the fifties it still seemed unreasonable to complain, because most people appeared to be so much better off. Even Susan "sold out" for a while under this pressure, as Alice tells her when she complains about the tedium of "lying for a living"(166) in the advertising industry.[11]

The *apparent* perfection of contemporary capitalism is ironically hinted at by the play's title. In 1957, Harold Macmillan could claim that "most of our people have never had it so good," and to some extent this was true (although the improvement was considerably exaggerated).[12] What was largely forgotten, though, was that the dreams of 1945 had not just been for a greater share of the national cake, but for abstract concepts such as justice, freedom and equality. The British sold their birthright for a mess of pottage, as Susan suggests in this hyperbolic dinner menu:

> Now, there was dinner. I made some more dinner for Leonard. A little ham. And chicken. And some pickles and tomato. And lettuce. And there are a couple of pheasants in the fridge. And I can get twelve bottles of claret from the cellar. Why not?

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9. D. E. Cooper, "Looking Back On Anger," in Bogdanor and Skidelsky, p. 276-77.
10. *One-Dimensional Man*, pp. 1-2.
11. The advertising industry, like the press in later plays, is one of Hare's favourite symbols of the self-deception of modern capitalism. Anna Seaton also worked in advertising for a while, before deciding "to live an honest life."
12. David Childs, *Britain since 1945* (London: Ernest Benn, 1979), p. 106. For evidence of this exaggeration, see, for example, John Saville, "Labour and Income Redistribution," in *The Socialist Register, 1965* (London: Merlin Press, 1965), pp. 147-162.

> There is plenty. (179)

This excessive bill of fare indicates that she feels that they have crossed the fine line between affluence and decadence. She continues this image of gluttony later on, commenting that "we've all lived like camels off the fat in our humps"(198). There is indeed plenty, but this is probably a mixed blessing.

The real cause of Susan's frustration is not simply dissatisfaction with the existing social order, nor the feeling that she can do nothing to improve it, but the fact that she cannot even convince anyone else that it *needs* improving. In times of prosperity, criticism often falls on deaf ears:

> . . . in the contemporary period, the technological controls appear to be the very embodiment of Reason for the benefit of all social groups and interests — to such an extent that all contradiction seems irrational and all counteraction impossible.[13]

Susan does not want to participate in what she perceives as a charade, but "the intellectual and emotional refusal 'to go along' appears neurotic and impotent."[14] When Darwin asks Brock, "mental illness, is it? Your wife?"(173) he is voicing a common response to unconventional behaviour. But it is *society* which is mad, not Susan. The only reason that no one recognises society's madness is that "the insanity of the whole absolves the particular insanities and turns the crimes against humanity into a rational enterprise."[15] Since insanity is defined in accordance with the norms of a particular community, it does not matter that Susan is right and everyone else is wrong — she is the one who seems irrational, like the sane person in a lunatic asylum.

It could be argued that Susan's dissatisfaction stems entirely from her inability to accept the mundane nature of peace compared with the excitement of war. After all, Hare admits that "I had originally been attracted by a statistic . . . that 75 per cent of the women flown behind the lines for the Special Operations Executive were subsequently divorced after the war."[16] And Susan supports this when she explains to Brock why she was on holiday in Belgium with Tony Radley in 1947:

> Those of us who went through this kind of war, I think we do have something in common. It's a kind of impatience, we're rather intolerant, we don't suffer fools. And so we get rather restless back in England, the people who stayed behind seem childish and a little silly. (146)

Later, in an ironic echo of Darwin's statement about the reconstruction of Europe, she reveals that she enjoys the Suez Crisis simply because it provides some excitement:

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13. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 9.
14. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 9.
15. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 52.
16. "Introduction," p. 15.

> Isn't this an exciting week? Don't you think? Isn't this thrilling? Don't you think? Everything is up for grabs. At last. We will see some changes. Thank the Lord. (179)

And she twice complains to Alice that "I want to move on. I do desperately want to feel I'm moving on"(150,151).

But this is not the whole answer, because Susan's attitude towards the war is ambivalent. While she was in it, she hated it; when Lazar meets her in occupied France she bemoans the ingratitude of the locals, saying, "they just expect the English to die. They sit and watch us spitting blood in the streets"(140). Yet three years later she only remembers the "astonishing kindnesses" and the "bravery"(158). Clearly, something has happened to make her edit out all the worst aspects of the war, just as Archie Maclean forgets all the most unpleasant elements of his childhood when he makes a film about his life.

The cause of this change is the betrayal of the war-time idealism. When asked about the activities of the Special Operations Executive in a radio interview, she replies that "it was the one part of the war from which the British emerge with the greatest possible valour and distinction"(188). Yet she gives a non-committal response to the question, "did you feel that any of your colleagues died needlessly?"(188) Although she is reluctant to admit it, she does suspect that their sacrifice was wasted, and because of this she sees *herself* as the real victim of the war in Europe. Lazar, who has similar problems adjusting to civilian life, gives a clue to the nature of their plight:

> I don't know what I'd expected. . . . What I'd hoped for, at the time I returned. Some sort of edge to the life that I lead. Some sort of feeling their death was worthwhile. (204)

Susan was more idealistic than most during the war, even though she found it very unpleasant. This was not because of a sheltered upbringing, like Anna Seaton, but as a psychological defence against the extreme stress which her mission placed on her. She needed to believe very strongly that what she was doing was worthwhile, in order to make the fear and the loneliness bearable.

This explains why she continually glorifies the war, or at least her part of it, and the people who fought it. Because it is the only period of her life in which she has felt that she was doing good, in which there was any possibility of doing good, she cannot bring herself to admit that all that suffering was for nothing. In Susan's revised history, the world was once populated with people of superhuman moral strength, and the obvious weakness of those around her allows her to blame everyone else for their failure to fulfil the great moral ambitions of 1945. This increases her dissatisfaction, and explains her fascination with Lazar, of whom she says, "not a day goes by without my wondering where he is"(158).

There is therefore an element of truth in Brock's comment that "when you talk longingly about the war . . . some deception usually follows"(159). But her judicious editing of her memories of the past is no worse than his own, and that of the majority of the population, so we cannot agree with his prescription for a "cure" for what ails her:

> I really shan't ever give up, I won't surrender till you're well again. And that to me would mean your admitting one thing: that in the life you have led you have utterly failed, failed in the very, very heart of your life. Admit it. Then perhaps you might really move on. (200)

If Susan has utterly failed in her life, it is because the whole country has failed to take advantage of the opportunity offered by the war. Brock's pragmatic acceptance of the existing situation, and the implication that Susan's idealism is a personal fault rather than something to be proud of, is a perfect example of Marcuse's theory about the pseudo-rationality of contemporary capitalism.

Susan is bound to lose either way. If she had given in to the enticements available to the wife of a moderately wealthy man, she would have lost all self-respect, but by retaining her idealism, she commits herself to a perpetual and apparently futile revolt. In the society in which she lives there appear to be no other options open to her, and the path she chooses poses contradictions between her personal ideology and the dominant social ideology which she is unable to resolve.

In fact, Susan's is not an isolated problem. The bohemian lifestyle which she and Alice lead in the early fifties was to become increasingly fashionable as the decade wore on. They are unwitting representatives of the group of influential literary figures generally called the Angry Young Men, whom Cooper describes thus:

> There was still an Empire; the bulk of industry was still in private hands; Oxford and Cambridge still ruled the roost; church attendance had not declined by much; the British cinema was as bad as ever. In this atmosphere it was the hopefuls of 1945 that had become the audience for books expressing their own bitterness in 1956.[17]

The Angry Young Men were self-styled rebels, unhappy with the existing state of affairs, but since political opposition seemed impossible, they could do no more than keep up a kind of petulant cultural barracking. Whatever their original motivation, their criticism was soon aimed almost exclusively at instances of the decadence of fifties Britain. Instead of attacking inequality, they were offended by "pettiness, snobbery, flippancy, voluptuousness, superficiality, materialism."[18]

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17. "Looking Back On Anger," p. 277. The fact that the name of this group is restricted to men probably reflects who had access to publication, etc., rather than indicating a greater degree of satisfaction among women. If anything, women had more to be dissatisfied about.
18. Cooper, p. 257.

Susan and Darwin are the clearest examples in the play of the effects of the ideological contradictions of modern capitalism. As long as the audience perceives such problems as afflicting only those who have lived too long or been born too soon, however, their relevance to their own lives may not be apparent. This is why Hare includes Raymond Brock, to establish a link between the characters on stage and the members of the audience. Brock faces the same moral dilemma as Susan, but instead of remaining true to his principles adopts a "pragmatic" solution. He is basically a good person, but is "realistic" enough to know that idealism is best kept for special occasions. Hare writes that Brock's choice "is the kind of death so many members of the audience have chosen, a death by compromise and absorption into institutional life."[19] Brock's easy acceptance of the existing order is just as unsatisfactory as Susan's fruitless opposition, not just because it is morally inadequate, but because it does not make him happy. In terms of Hare's political message, Brock's progress from complacency to disillusionment is probably the most important in the play.

Brock has always been somewhat ambivalent about the prospects for change. In September 1947, he says, "I think everyone's going to be rich very soon. Once we've got over the effects of the war. It's going to be coming out of everyone's ears"(155). Yet three months earlier, talking about the refugees in Europe, he is far less optimistic about the future:

> The misery is contagious, I suppose. You spend the day driving between bomb sites, watching the hungry, the homeless, the bereaved. We think there are thirty million people loose in Europe who've had to flee across borders, have had to start again. And it is very odd to watch it all from here. (145)

"From here" is from his privileged position within the Embassy. He is slightly apologetic, because he is aware of his privilege. Given these pangs of conscience, why does he not do as Susan does, and rebel against the inertia of the bureaucracy entrusted with the task of creating the new world?

There are two reasons for this. One is that capitalism seems to have a lot to offer to those who are lucky enough to be born on the right side of the tracks. Brock makes a great deal of money after the war, and since the people like him who are meant to administer the change are doing well out of the old system, they are quite happy that it should continue:

> I find it immoderately easy to acquire. I seem to have a sort of mathematical gift. The stock exchange. Money sticks to my fingers I find. I triple my income. What can I do? (155)

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19. "Introduction," p. 15.

His optimism at the end of the war is entirely different from Darwin's; while the Ambassador talks of education and agriculture, the Third Secretary talks of money, especially his own. When Brock says that "everyone" is going to be rich, he is really talking about himself, which reveals a strong element of self-interest in his motivation. He sees well-being largely in financial terms, having introjected the values appropriate to a society which relies on acquisitiveness. In such circumstances, old-fashioned concepts such as spirituality, love and self-respect become faintly embarrassing. As Marcuse says, "the political needs of society become individual needs and aspirations, their satisfaction promotes business and the commonweal, and the whole appears to be the very embodiment of Reason."[20]

This quotation from Marcuse also indicates the other reason for Brock's acquiescence. Although he is sometimes critical of the civil service he can, like Susan, see no alternative. It presents itself as the best means of giving aid to those in need that humans can devise. When she attacks him for adopting a phoney public school idiom, he can only defend himself halfheartedly: "I'm sorry, I was awful, I apologize. But the work I do is not entirely contemptible. Of course our people are dull, they're stuffy, they're death. But what other world do I have?"(158)

Despite this rationalisation of his behaviour, however, the contradiction between what he believes should be happening and what is really happening still exists, and he is still aware of it. By the end of the play, when he has lost his job in the diplomatic corps and has to sell the house, his earlier cheerful avarice has disappeared:

> I can't help feeling it will be better, I'm sure. Too much money. I think that's what went wrong. Something about it corrupts the will to live. Too many years spent sloshing around. (195)

Although Susan's moral tutelage has had some influence on his change of heart, it is caused mainly by his own experience. When he is posted to Iran his conscience is stirred by his own affluence in the midst of so much poverty:

> The sky. The desert. And of course the poverty. Living among people who have to struggle so hard. It can make you see life very differently. (185-86)

From there, England "does look just a trifle decadent"(186). This teaches him that money may actually be a curse rather than a blessing, because it distances one from the real world.

The interesting point is that this recognition makes very little practical difference to his life. At the end of the play, Lazar tells Susan that after she gave their house to Alice for her women's refuge, "he'd [Brock] had to fight to get back into his home.

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[20]. *One-Dimensional Man*, p. ix.

There'd been some kind of trouble. Police, violence it seems . . ."(203) No doubt he felt some guilt at using the instruments of "law and order" against what he knows is a worthy cause, but he simply cannot help himself. And what he does seems quite reasonable; it is what most of us would do. But this simply shows that there are limits to his, and our, social conscience, because of the contradiction between the dictates of "society," which insists on the sanctity of property rights, and the dictates of "conscience," which recognises that there are more important things in life than possessions.

There is clearly a moral weakness involved in seeing that something is unjust but persisting with it regardless, simply because of the difficulties inherent in doing otherwise. If one accepts the system solely on pragmatic grounds, one is bound to become a little cynical, as Charleson and the six thousand other bureacrats in the Foreign Office have done:

> The irony is this: we had an empire to administer, there were six hundred of us in this place. Now it's to be dismantled and there are six thousand. As our power declines, the fight among us for access to that power becomes a little more more urgent, a little uglier perhaps. As our influence wanes, as our empire collapses, there is little to believe in. Behaviour is all. (193)

Brock also suffers from the spiritual sterility of seeing the faults in the system but giving in to them anyway. Despite his awareness of the corruption around him, he can still look back regretfully on what he has lost when he moves to the City to sell insurance:

> Something in the Foreign Office suited my style. Whatever horrible things people say. At least they were hypocrites, I do value that now. Hypocrisy does keep things pleasant for at least part of the time. Whereas down in the City they don't even try. (196)

Even with his greater recognition of the inequality of society, he still feels the urge to accumulate wealth, partly because he has absorbed the materialistic values of capitalism, and partly because he is fatalistic about the possibility of change. There is an irony in his rhetorical question, "which is the braver? To live as I do? Or never, ever to face life like you?"(199) In fact, Susan's opposition, soul-destroying though it is, displays a great deal more courage than his apathy. What Brock means by "life" is simply a euphemism for the corrupt half-life of those who welcome whole-heartedly the trappings of capitalism.

Contrary to what we might expect, this abdication of moral responsibility does not necessarily lead to a carefree life. Perhaps it does for Charleson, but when Brock leaves the Foreign Office for a job in the city he says, "it gives her [Susan] something

new to despise. The sad thing is this time . . . I despise it as well"(196-97). He can never entirely suppress the pangs of his conscience, which remind him that he is not living in accordance with his principles. He is not alone in this; Lazar complains that he, too, has sold out:

> Some day I must tell you. I don't feel I've done well. I gave in. Always. All along the line. Suburb. Wife. Hell. I work in a corporate bureaucracy as well . . . (204)

This is fortunate, from Hare's point of view, because it enables him to tell his audience, a large proportion of whom have given in just as Brock and Lazar have done, that there *is* an alternative, and that they would be happier if they adopted it because they would not have to face this internal contradiction between morality and practicality.

## III

Susan's problems are not caused solely by the ideology of capitalism, however. She is also oppressed by the patriarchal structure of the society in which she lives. In particular, she suffers from the possessiveness inherent in the romantic, monogamic ideal of love which has dominated the Western world for several centuries, and which was still very strong during the fifties. In *Licking Hitler* we saw the temporary freedom which the war allowed women, as well as the sexism which still prevailed:

> Lavish tributes continued to be paid by American and British government spokesmen to the magnificent job that women had done, but behind the scenes their male-dominated bureaucracies were casting post-war plans on the assumption that most of the women would meekly return to their ageless mission as wives and mothers.[21]

Susan's mission in France gave her more freedom than most, because she was thrown entirely on her own resources, and it is quite understandable that she wants to hold on to that independence. Lazar and Tony find the drab existence of peace-time Britain unbearably restrictive, but Susan, with the same war-time experience, is in a much worse situation, because there are far fewer options open to her.

A diplomat's wife, which is what Brock wants Susan to become, was (and perhaps still is) regarded as merely an appendage to her husband, an adornment to his career as long as she is charming and decorative. Susan resists this, saying, "I do think to be merely your husband's wife is demeaning for a woman of any integrity at

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21. John Costello, *Love, Sex and War; Changing Values 1939-1945* (London: Guild Publishing, 1985), p. 365.

all . . ."(190) She wants to have a child without the encumbrance of a husband, because she feels, "I don't see . . . why I should have to compromise, why I should have to make some sad and decorous marriage just to have a child. I don't see why any woman should have to do that"(162). In fact, she regards her marriage to Brock as a moment of weakness, as she tells Lazar, "it was after Raymond's kindness [in buying Mick's silence after Susan has shot at him] I felt I had to get engaged"(203).

Initially, she seems to believe that the possessive attitude to women is limited to her own class, because she selects Mick, a working class entrepreneur, to father her child. When he asks why she did not choose one of "your own people"(162), she replies that "they simply would not agree to sleep with me if they knew it was a child I was after"(163). With Mick she feels there will be few ties:

> I chose you because . . . I don't see you very much. I barely ever see you. We live at opposite ends of town. Different worlds. (164)

She soon discovers, however, that the male proprietary sense is just as strong in the East End as it is in the civil service. Although Mick agrees, he refuses to believe that she is not really longing for Mr Right, commenting that "it can't be what you want. Not deep down"(164). Implicit in his conviction that he can "cure" her is the arrogant but common assumption that a woman is not "complete" without a man.

This explains why he is reluctant to discontinue the experiment after it has failed. As soon as it becomes clear that Susan really does not want him, however, he becomes vindictive, abusing both Susan and Alice:

> MICK: You people are cruel.
> SUSAN: Please.
> MICK: You are cruel and dangerous.
> SUSAN: Mick.
> MICK: You fuck people up. This little tart and her string of married men, all fucked up, all fucking ruined by this tart. (170)

The ease with which his "love" for Susan turns into its opposite is a clear indication that his feelings for her always had more to do with ownership than with human affection.[22]

The insults he throws at them are also revealing. In his eyes, Alice is a "tart" because she sleeps with married men, threatening their marriages. The sexual double standard is obvious; there is no condemnation of the men who sleep with her at all. She is the *femme fatale*, and her lovers her innocent victims. Women's sexual "impurity" has always been a sin in patriarchal society, because it threatens the established order of property. Mick's attack on Susan is even more interesting. He

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22. It is also concerned with other forms of power. Mick is mightily offended that Susan might "think it's my fault"(169), that she is casting a slur on his virility.

claims that "she is actually mad"(170). People find her sexual independence just as incomprehensible as her resistance to conformity in other areas. Since she does not want what society has to offer, she is, almost by definition, "insane." This confirms Marcuse's statement that "the restrictions imposed upon the libido appear as the more rational, the more universal they become, the more they permeate the whole of society."[23] Again, however, her resistance to social conventions, far from being a sign of madness, is eminently sensible.

The oppressive nature of romantic "love" is a major theme of Hare's work, which I will return to in later chapters. But women are not the only ones to suffer under the patriarchy. Hare writes that "I intend to show the struggle of a heroine against a deceitful and emotionally stultified class."[24] He wants to show that the constraints imposed by "respectability" are unnecessarily restrictive; that they are, in fact, *surplus repression.* In this play, at least, emotional and sexual repression is most evident in men, and in men of a particular class. Hare wishes to persuade his audience of the truth of the French farmer's statement in his conversation with Susan at the end of the war:

> FRENCHMAN: The English . . . have no feelings, yes? Are stiff.
> SUSAN: They hide them, hide them from the world.
> FRENCHMAN: Is stupid.
> SUSAN: Stupid, yes. (207)

Hare must show that this "stultification" is undesirable, and also that it is caused largely by the patriarchal organisation of society. Only then can he suggest to the men in his audience that they would be better off under a fairer system.

The problem is not hard to see. Brock, Darwin and Charleson are all uncomfortable with emotion and sexuality. Susan sums them up when she says, "these kind and likeable men, they do have another side to their nature and that is they are very limited in their ideas, they are frightened of the unknown, they want a quiet life where sex is either sport or duty but absolutely nothing in between"(162-63). Brock, for example, objects when Susan says that Darwin would be unable to "stick his prick into a bucket of lard"(157), but cannot bring himself to say the word "prick." In order to protect themselves from unseemly displays of their baser instincts they have built up a series of elaborate social rituals. Charleson admits as much when he says that "behaviour is all"(193) in the cloistered world of the Foreign Office. It is significant that he calls the double-talk "diplomacy," and states proudly that "in its practice the English lead the world"(193). And Susan says that "Darwin thinks disasters are examinations in etiquette. Which fork to use in an earthquake"(144-45).

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23. *Eros and Civilization*, p. 46.
24. "Introduction," p. 15.

These rituals all prevent unpleasant subjects from being broached directly. Sometimes these subjects are political, but personal feelings are disguised by them as well. This denial is a clear instance of surplus repression. These instincts are not necessarily dangerous to society, yet they have been buried so deep that people will no longer admit to them.

There are several factors which contribute to this repression. The sexual instincts must be kept in check, otherwise they will destroy the social order --- Marcuse calls this "the desexualization of the organism required by its social utilization as an instrument of labour."[25] For instance, if people spend all their time making love they will starve to death. Yet this only accounts for basic repression; it does not explain the extra, unnecessary restrictions which Brock and his compatriots place on their own behaviour:

> Where sexually mature persons are concerned, object-choice is further narrowed down to the opposite sex and most of the extra-genital forms of satisfaction are interdicted as perversions. . . . But the only outlet not thus censured, heterosexual genital love, is further circumscribed by the barriers of legitimacy and monogamy.[26]

Freud admits that there is "no sort of justification" for this.[27] Clearly, therefore, it constitutes *surplus* repression, in the interests of maintaining a male-dominated social order. Untrammelled sexual activity of any kind would threaten the monogamic institutions which are the basis of modern patriarchal society. In order to preserve their authority over women, men are forced to impose restrictions on their own behaviour. In other words, the sexual repression of the characters in *Plenty* is indicative of a sub-conscious pact: "I won't seduce your wife if you don't seduce mine."

There is also an economic reason for their complete lack of spontaneity. In an age of advanced technological ability, it should be possible to produce enough for everybody with only a moderate amount of work. This would allow greater freedom to indulge in other pleasures, of which sex is one. But since capitalism cannot survive without the production of commodities, society is arranged so that millions of people still work very hard producing useless objects. There is a danger that they may recognise this, and decide that their needs can be satisfied with less toil. In the interests of the capitalist social order, the individual is conditioned to restrain his or her instincts in order that they do not interfere with their work:

> In the "normal" development, the individual lives his repression "freely" as his own life: he desires what he is supposed to desire; his

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25. *Eros and Civilization*, p. 39.
26. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (London: Hogarth Press, 1939), p. 75.
27. Freud, p. 74.

> gratifications are profitable to him and to others; he is reasonably and often even exuberantly happy. This happiness, which takes place part-time during the few hours of leisure between the working days or working nights, but sometimes also during work, enables him to continue his performance, which in turn perpetuates his labor and that of others. His erotic performance is brought in line with his societal performance.[28]

Sex has been reduced to a pastime which is qualitatively little different from watching television. Everyone accepts that it can only be enjoyed outside working hours. Once people's instincts have been channelled into this narrow path, they will no longer endanger the "important" things of life, such as making money.

These two factors may account for *sexual* repression, but this is only one aspect of the "*emotional* stultification" which Hare ascribes to the men of Brock's class. This emotional repression probably has its roots in the Enlightenment and earlier, when Reason was a revolutionary force in the struggle of the emerging capitalist class against the hereditary authority of feudalism. As with all such concepts (individualism, liberalism, etc.), reason could have proved an embarrassment if it had been used by other groups (women or the proletariat) to challenge their oppression. To prevent this, women were usually denied the capacity for rational thought, just as they had earlier been denied souls:

> An elaborate mythology evolved round natural feminine uselessness. The helplessness, frivolity, illogicality of female creatures was put about. A kindly paternalism cloaked women's real powerlessness. Their masters kindly protected them for their own good.[29]

This is probably the origin of the distinction between "male" rationality and "female" emotionality. Since men had claimed the high ground of reason, women were allowed the emotional sphere, since it was there that they could be most useful to men, as "nurturers." This ideological manoeuvre has back-fired, however, as emotional sensitivity is now recognised as a valuable trait, and men are finding it difficult to escape from the powerful social forces which hamper its development in their sex.

This theme of men as victims of structures designed to oppress women is another one that Hare returns to frequently. But it is important to note that this emotional stultification exacerbates the other problems facing women. Susan cannot find a decent relationship with any of the men of her class, because they are all so repressed:

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28. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 46.
29. Sheila Rowbotham, *Women, Resistance and Revolution* (London: Allen Lane, 1972), p. 29.

> But then . . . even for myself I do like to make a point of sleeping with men I don't know. I do find once you get to know them you usually don't want to sleep with them any more . . . (178)

It is no accident that Susan's closest friendship in the play is with Alice, because with another woman romantic possessiveness is less likely to be a problem. Her reluctance to marry is caused not only by her desire to remain independent, however, but also by the fact that the men she meets do not seem worth spending much time with. She tells Mick, "I'm afraid I'm rather strongminded, as you know, and so with them I usually feel I'm holding myself in for fear of literally blowing them out of the room"(162).

There is no doubt that the men she meets are severely repressed, but her antagonism towards them is increased by her romanticisation of the war. She finds reality mundane and hard to accept, because of the way she has made all the characters in her historical drama larger than life. Lazar is her knight in shining armour, but when she meets him again he is just as much in need of reassurance as Mick. Like Anna, her life is dominated by the myth which she has created about her war, and although this myth only concerns the relations between the classes, it influences her sexual and emotional relations as well.

Of course, this would not be a problem if the women were as repressed as the men. Certainly, Susan and Alice are more open in their attitudes to sex and marriage. Susan tells Brock that "unphysical isn't innocent. Unphysical in my view is repressed"(147). Later, Alice says that "I had an idea that lust . . . that lust was very good. And could be made simple. And cheering. And light"(197). There seems to be no reason in the play why they should be so far ahead of their time, so presumably Hare is simply using them as a contrast to the men. This suggests that he is more interested in the disadvantages which men suffer under the existing system than in the problems faced by women.

## I V

*Plenty* has reached a much wider audience as a film than as a stage play. For this reason, it is worth examining the film version, which was made in 1985 with Fred Schepisi as director and Meryl Streep as Susan. This differs from Hare's original in several important respects. Hare and Schepisi worked together on the screenplay, but despite Schepisi's statement that "we had an extraordinary collaboration — very happy indeed," there is a clear tension within the film, which suggests a contradiction between the vision of the director and the vision of the author.[30] In fact, the film provides strong support for McGrath's scepticism about the possibility of creating political drama in a medium controlled by the Establishment. Most of the political

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30. "Man of Plenty," *Cinema Papers*, 56 (March, 1986), p. 25.

content, and nearly all of the interest, is bleached from the original play, in order to allow Meryl Streep to portray yet another tortured heroine.

The clearest evidence of the way that the play's political content is diminished is Susan's relationship with Lazar. In the play, there is no hint of any sexual contact between them during the war, and Susan's longing for him is largely retrospective, a romantic escape into a fantasised past when there was still hope of radical social change. In the film version, however, their initial meeting is greatly expanded; they return to her room, make love, and the next day they exchange meaningful glances when she sees him cycling off as she walks home from work. He leaves her a pair of cuff-links, non-existent in the play, which she carries with her for many years, and which he finds in her handbag when they meet again in the early sixties. The implication is very strong that Susan's ideal has more to do with Sam Neill, who acts the role of Lazar, than it does with abstract notions of social justice. The sex scenes between two such popular actors may have drawn the crowds, but it encourages the view that Susan's problems are entirely personal. Her *political* dissatisfaction, which is the main focus of the play, becomes largely irrelevant.

This process of covert censorship continues in the rest of the film. Two of the many scenes which have been added show Susan's "madness." First, we see Brock visiting her in hospital some time after she has shot at Mick, and then Alice visits them in Jordan (changed, for some reason, from Iran), and complains about the fact that Susan is kept under constant sedation (also a new invention). She argues with Brock, wanting to take Susan back to England, but the issue for both of them is the best way to "cure" her. By encouraging the members of the audience to accept the idea of Susan's psychological instability, the film also encourages them to discount her occasional political statements. In fact, Susan is only "insane" because she refuses to acquiesce to the norms of an insane society.

Presumably Hare agreed to these alterations, but there is some evidence that he is not entirely happy with them. There are a few new speeches in which the play's original political message is stated quite explicitly, but these are swamped by the rest of the film. For example, while Susan is working at the shipping office, she moans to Alice, "I want to change everything and I don't know how." Later, during the radio interview, she is very definite about her war-time idealism:

> Well I suppose we were fighting for freedom. But I'm not saying, please, it wasn't a grand idea, it was in us, it was bred in us. We were fighting for a world which could be better.

Such assertions are completely at odds with the rest of the film, in which her idealism is barely mentioned, or at least is much less important than her inability to cope with the "real world."

There are other changes to the film which suggest a desire on the part of the producers to bowdlerise the stage version of the play. The confrontation between Lazar and the French resistance fighter is omitted, and replaced with a German patrol which searches the area and from which Susan and Lazar are lucky to escape. Just before Lazar leaves, German soldiers shoot dead a Frenchman in the village. There is no doubt who the villains are here, and therefore no doubt who the heroes are either. Hare's criticism of the British role in the war has completely disappeared. (Schepisi does make some harsh statements about the Suez Crisis, but this is much less contentious, because everyone admits that the invasion of the Canal Zone was a disaster.) By portraying the war as a comic strip adventure, Susan's false nostalgia about the heroism of the war is mispresented as the truth. Although the film does admit to a measure of decadence and corruption in Britain during the 1950s, this is restricted to a small clique, and the blame for it is placed squarely on the shoulders of a few inept, self-seeking politicians and bureaucrats like Charleson. The system itself remains sacrosanct.

## Chapter 4
## Sgt. Pepper's lonely hearts club band:
## *Teeth 'n' Smiles*

Given Hare's great debt to the radical movements of the sixties, it is surprising that he has written only one play about the period.[1] First performed at the Royal Court Theatre in London in September 1975, *Teeth 'n' Smiles* is the third play in the history cycle. It is set in June 1969, at a time when it was becoming clear that, as Arthur says (quoting *The Daily Express*), "the acid dream is over."[2] Like any political playwright who has been influenced by the counter-culture, Hare must come to terms with the failure of the "revolution" of the sixties, possibly the most widespread radical movement ever. Defeat engenders apathy, and it is a cliché that the radicals of the sixties are the conservatives of today. Hare must decide whether Herbert Marcuse's pessimism about the possibility of social change is justified. Is the existing system so firmly entrenched that all forms of opposition can be safely absorbed?

Hare's first project in the play is therefore an examination of the theoretical justification for fatalism. His examination takes the form of a fairly complete account of the reasons for the demise of the radical left. He is particularly interested in how far the revolution contained the seeds of its own destruction, and how far it was defeated by reactionary forces. In other words, did it fall or was it pushed? His conclusion is slightly ambivalent, but on balance optimistic. Clearly, there is no way that it can be proved that revolution is no longer possible; the very fact that the question can be asked shows that opposition can still exist, no matter how ineffective. Hare's account of the many flaws in the radical movement is strangely reassuring, because it suggests that the revolution failed because of those flaws, and not because it ran up against an immovable object.

*Teeth 'n' Smiles* is much more than just a philosophical tract about free will and determinism, however. It is also a polemic of the need for change. The failure of the sixties makes radical change even more urgent, because of the tremendous suffering it caused. *Plenty* describes the massive disillusionment which resulted from the betrayal of the idealism of the war years. The disappointment was perhaps even greater in 1969, at the death knell of a far more profound social revolution. Hare examines in depth the effects of this, and shows that the characters are either tearing themselves

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1. With the exception of *The Great Exhibition* (1969), whose content is too specific to constitute a history play.
2. David Hare, *Teeth 'n' Smiles* (London: Faber and Faber, 1976), p. 51. All further references to this work appear in the text.

apart, trying to hold on to some hope for the future, or turning themselves into zombies, to escape from that future.

As usual, Hare is concerned not only with capitalism, but with the patriarchy as well. This also gives the play a distinctive, sixties flavour. He considers the consequences of what is inaccurately called the sexual revolution, and registers his scepticism about the emancipatory power of sexual activity. He demonstrates, again following Marcuse, that in fact this was just a new and more advanced form of social control. Given the misogyny of the sixties radical movement, it was unlikely to be anything else. Through the characters of Maggie and Laura, Hare shows the oppressive nature of the ideology of free love, and also mounts his customary attack on romanticism. The problems of both women are compounded by the contradictions between these two dogma.

## I

Hare writes that "*Teeth 'N' Smiles* is about 'the new man'; whether we have any chance of changing ourselves."[3] Arthur echoes this when he says, "Leonardo da Vinci drew submarines. Five hundred years ago. They looked pretty silly. Today we are drawing a new man. He may look pretty silly"(52). This fundamental change in consciousness is Gramsci's counter-hegemony, the revolution which must *precede* the revolution. The play asks whether this can ever be achieved. John Bull says of the band, "their particular brand of unthinking destructive anarchy is powerless against the less obvious but infinitely elastic establishment represented by the College."[4] If the establishment is really "infinitely elastic," then political action is futile, because society will be able to absorb all opposition. Hare manages to avoid pessimism, however, because of Bull's phrase "unthinking destructive anarchy," which suggests that the failure of the radical movement in the sixties lies with a fault in the radicals themselves, and leaves open the possibility that a more self-conscious group could be more effective.

This is not to deny, however, that society is very good at absorbing opposition. The diversity of the 1960s appears to be quite different from the relentless conformity in *Plenty*, but Arthur, in one of his more despairing moments, argues that this is simply "an obstacle course"(22-23), designed to divert attention from the *real* issues:

> They invent a few rules that don't mean anything so that you can ruin your health trying to change them. Then overnight they re-draft them because they didn't really matter in the first place. One day it's

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3. "From Portable," p. 113.
4. Bull, p. 74.

> a revolution to say fuck on the bus. Next day it's the only way to get a ticket. That's how the system works. (22)

The bohemian lifestyle which seemed threatening in 1953 was much more acceptable fifteen years later, but had lost its dangerous potential:

> . . . there is a great deal of "Worship together this week," "Why not try God," Zen, existentialism and beat ways of life, etc. But such modes of protest and transcendence are no longer contradictory to the status quo and no longer negative. They are rather the ceremonial part of practical behaviorism, its harmless negation, and are quickly digested by the status quo as part of its healthy diet.[5]

Despite its apparent eclecticism, Marcuse asserts that contemporary society is actually becoming increasingly uniform, because these "modes of protest and transcendence" have been reduced to palliatives, making the radicals feel good by persuading them that they were about to change society, while really posing no threat at all.

There is plenty of evidence of this in the play. The main "revolutionary force" in *Teeth 'n' Smiles* is rock music. But Saraffian points out that even the most "alternative" groups are gradually absorbed into the system:

> Bands just break up. Travel too much. Drop too much acid. Fifty-seven varieties of clap. Become too successful . . . they break up because they don't feel any need. I don't mean fame, that's boring, or money, that's a cliché, of course it goes without saying that money will separate you from the things you want to sing about, we all know that. I mean — need. Maggie. Where's the need? (71)

This is a classic case of the labourer being alienated from the object of his or her labour. As soon as bands start producing music because they have a contract, it becomes a commodity and the impetus disappears. Their music ceases to be a use-value; in other words, it ceases to be the natural expression of their consciousness, and becomes separate from them. When this happens, there is nothing left for them apart from the superficial benefits of stardom: money, fame and sex. This is the message of Maggie's story about the musician who returns from touring with The Who saying, "I got depressed because they're so very good, and yet even they ask the same questions I do every night: where is the money and where are the girls?"(39)

This affects the rank and file of the counter-culture as well. When rock music became the basis of an industry, it was marketed in exactly the same way as soap powder. Maggie is quite right when she tells Saraffian that the band is "just merchandise to you. . . . Soapflakes we could be"(51). The same thing happened to the various other elements of the youth culture, as it was more or less taken over by the

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5. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 14.

fashion industry. This meant that many people became involved out of a desire to be trendy, rather than out of a real desire for change. Anson, for instance, wants to join the movement because of its reputation for tolerance — in other words, he wants to find some friends. But this tolerance is something of a myth. As Arthur tells him, dropping out is "not so easy is it? I mean, the rules are so complicated, it's like three-dimensional chess"(59). Social change or personal liberation become less important than knowing the right slogans, using the right drugs, and wearing the right clothes. A competitive element, which Smegs criticises as "psychedelic chauvinism"(74), creeps into the movement, greatly reducing its political effectiveness.

The desire to be hip also means that even the more overtly "political" members of the movement were often more concerned about their own image than about the inequities of contemporary society. Hare believes that this was the case when he was at university in the years before 1968:

> It was impossible to do anything at Cambridge without a view to the effect you were creating. The writers were writers in order to be thought of as writers, not because they had anything to say.[6]

When Arthur bemoans the fact that "the people don't seem to have changed"(58) since he was at university, Anson ironically pretends that a fashionable activism represents a significant change in the consciousness of the younger generation:

> Oh, I don't know. There are a few more totallys, you know. I should think. I share digs with a totally. I mean, I call him a totally, what happens is he has his friends to tea, I never stay, I just occasionally have to let them in the door and I overhear them, they're always sitting there saying, 'The whole system's totally corrupt an's gotta be totally replaced by a totally new system', so I just stand at the door and say, 'Couple more totallys for you, Tom.' (58)

Arthur's (and Hare's) vision was of a new humanity, a kind of universal Gestalt switch. But the sum total of the sixties achievement seems to have been a *fashion* for change, rather than a *passion* for change.

If these were the only reasons for the failure of the revolution, then it would be easy to despair about the possibility of ever improving the current unsatisfactory state of affairs, because the system seems to have corrupted the movement so easily. It could seem that Bull is right, and that the establishment is "infinitely elastic." But Hare devotes a large part of the play to an analysis of the flaws of the radical movement. If the main reason for the failure was not the power of the system, but the weakness of the movement, this would provide a perverse sort of comfort, because it would mean

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6. "From Portable," p. 109.

that we could rectify those errors made by the sixties radicals and succeed where they failed. At least there would be no excuse for not trying.

In fact, Hare finds that the main reasons for the defeat do not involve manipulation by reactionary forces. One of these reasons is the gulf which existed between students and non-students. This political disharmony is illustrated in the play. For one thing, the band hates the students. Laura and Arthur describe the undergraduates at the "cosmic accident called Jesus College Ball"(21) as "narcissists . . . . Yahoos. . . . Intellectuals. . . . rich complacent self-loving self-regarding self-righteous phoney half-baked politically immature neurotic evil-minded little shits"(22). Nor are the students very impressed with the band. They are annoyed that they begin to play so late, and after the first set they complain about the quality, as Wilson reports:

> Do you know, some woofter comes up to me after the set, says I expectin' somethin' altogether more Dionysiac, I says Thursdays we're Dionysiac, Fridays we're jus' fuckin' awful. (33)

And even within the band there are divisions. Despite Arthur's contempt for the denizens of his old college, his "oddly discreet"(11) silk suit and silver top hat indicate that he is by breeding more compatible with them than with the cockney Wilson and the black Nash. When Peyote sees him, he asks, "wot's that creep doin' 'ere?"(17) These working-class characters also have little or no sympathy for Maggie, who grew up in middle-class Stevenage and had a convent school education. Only Arthur defends her.

The gap between students and other radical groups, in particular, the traditional left, resulted largely from the narrow class base of the student movement, which meant that its members had very little in common with the experiences of the militant workers. Mostly white and middle-class, the students had never suffered deprivation, and were concerned primarily with issues which affected them directly, such as political control of the university. A common explanation of their rebellion is that "the middle-class revolutionaries were acting out their disappointment and rage at a society which offered them far less power and freedom than their permissive childhoods had led them to expect."[7] Although Hare would not lump all the sixties activists together as "spoiled brats," a considerable proportion of them seem to have been. This, he implies, is the main reason why the revolutionary potential of the decade came to naught.[8]

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7. Bouchier, p. vii.

8. Hare's low opinion of most sixties radicals, both students and non-students, does not undermine my analysis of his intellectual antecedents in Chapter 1. He can quite consistently accept the ideas put forward by Marcuse and the other theoretical leaders of the movement, while showing scant respect for many of their followers. In any case, the play's depiction of the counter-culture is not entirely negative; Maggie and Arthur, at least, retain a measure of idealism.

Two consequences of this supposed immaturity are a love of chaos and an indifference towards serious political questions. For all the characters, not just the middle class ones, the ball is a cathartic experience which provides a great party and nothing more. In the first line of the play, Inch walks into the undergraduate's room which has been converted for the band and says, "right. Let's smash the place up"(11). Later, Maggie starts a fire in a tent, and the other members of the band rush around enjoying the disorder. Inch says proudly that "I jus' drove the van across the cricket pitch"(81), and Wilson exclaims, "that was the best night I 'ad in years"(85). The students enjoy themselves just as much, as Arthur notices:

> They all love it you know. Dashing about in the smoke. They're hoping to make it an annual event. (79)

Even Saraffian comes in saying, "my God, but that was fun"(81). There is an atmosphere of Carnival, in which everyone is able to satisfy those desires which are usually repressed in the interests of social equilibrium. Along with this self-indulgence goes a general lack of interest in political affairs, illustrated by what Arthur describes as Peyote's usual response to questions about the role of popular music in society: "Off and fuck"(20).

This examination of the failings of the radical left should make anyone who is concerned about the state of society and about the possibility of changing it feel better. From what we have seen of the 60s counter-culture, the representatives of the *status quo* could simply watch it self-destruct. This means that if the radical movement could solve all its problems, there is no reason why it should not try again. That is, if it could broaden its class base and avoid internal wrangling, it would at least have a chance of success. And this is certainly possible, because Hare's programme is intended to show that socialism would be just as good for the bourgeoisie as for the proletariat, though for different reasons. So Hare has demonstrated that fatalism is unwarranted. Of course, he cannot *prove* that the system is incapable of absorbing all criticism, but he has shown that there is no reason to assume that it can, because the revolution of the sixties would have failed anyway.

## II

Hare's examination of the sixties is not intended just to show that change is still possible, however. The failure of the revolt actually increased the sum total of unhappiness in society; the psychological aftermath was disastrous. This makes the need for change even more urgent. Maggie and Arthur, the two most developed characters in the play, suffer a similar problem to that faced by Susan Traherne in *Plenty*. All of them must come to terms with a failed revolution. The difference between them is that Susan lives in a society which pretends that it has lived up to her

ideals, while the beliefs of Maggie and Arthur (and the rest of the counter-culture) were always treated as naïvely utopian by those in power. This patronising attitude did not matter, as long as there was a chance of changing society in such a way that their vision could become reality. Once it becomes clear that this is not going to happen, as it has by the start of the play, the contradictions between the dominant ideology and their own alternative assume greater proportions. The projected words at the end of the play are heavily ironic:

> MAGGIE
> ARTHUR
> SARAFFIAN
> THE BAND
> ALIVE
> WELL
> LIVING IN ENGLAND (91)

Society regards them as "well" because they are alive. In this respect, they are better off than Peyote, who "INHALED HIS OWN VOMIT/ DIED IN A HOTEL ROOM IN SAN ANTONIO TEXAS/ APRIL 17TH 1973"(91), but their dreadful alienation makes them far from well by any truly human standards.

Maggie exemplifies the problem most obviously. She claims that she is being pulled in several different directions at once:

> You know I've always pitied schizophrenics . . . . Struggling along on two personalities. I have seventeen, I have twenty-one. (69)

Saraffian replies, "like everyone else"(69). Despite Maggie's self-glorification, hers is a common problem. In the previous chapters, I have treated ideological conflict as if it were a binary opposition with, for example, "morality" on the one hand and "practicality" on the other, but Saraffian points out that it is much more complicated than that. For one thing, ideology operates in all areas of life, the "personal" as well as the public; for another, there are always conflicting ideological systems giving different moral signals, so that even knowing what one is *supposed* to do is often far from obvious. Aspects of all these different systems are introjected by the individual, and each aspect forms part of the personality, so it is no wonder that Maggie does not feel that her character is a single, consistent entity. No one else's is either.

We can only guess at the ideological contradictions faced by the minor characters, because all we really see of them are the forms of escape which they adopt. For Peyote, Smegs, Wilson, Inch and Nash these consist of various combinations of alcohol and drugs — the latter, which once seemed to be tremendously liberating, changing society by changing people's consciousness, are now used for purely defensive purposes. Maybe they are mourning the passing of the revolution, and their

cynicism is just a disguise. Or perhaps they are like Archie Maclean, resentful of the privilege which is so apparent at Cambridge, and trying to hide from their own inactivity in the face of it. As Saraffian points out, "they want to be addicted so's to have something to blame"(69).

The manager is in no position to criticise, however. He claims to be a committed socialist. In a long monologue towards the end of the play, he tells Maggie that as he lay in the wreckage of a bombed nightclub during the war, and felt someone stealing his rings, his first thought was "I'm with you, pal"(83). He proceeds to claim that "there is a war going on. All the time. A war of attrition"(84). But Maggie is unimpressed, because he does a very good imitation of a successful capitalist:

> Well, I'm sure it gives you comfort, your nice little class war. It ties things up very nicely, of course, from the outside you look like any other clapped-out businessman, but inside, oh, inside you got it all worked out.
>
> This man has believed the same thing for thirty years. And it does not show. Is that going to happen to us? (84)

His passive class consciousness is just as much an escape from reality as Peyote's pills.

Unlike the members of the band, Arthur admits to idealism, and unlike Saraffian he sticks to his ideals. His problem is that while he is aware of the parlous state of the counter-culture, he has no choice but to stick with it long after it has passed its prime, because it is the only potentially revolutionary force available. There is more than a hint of desperation in his plea to Maggie, "you and I, Maggie . . . we still want to say something. Yes?"(51) Of all the characters, he is the most reluctant to accept the failure of the dream, because the only alternative, as far as he can see, is "rolling down the highway into middle age. Complacency. Prurience. Sadism. Despair"(88). This makes him very lonely, as those around him seem more interested in the superficies of revolution than the thing itself. He sees that the hippy forms of "revolutionary" activity, such as hard drugs, are more likely to destroy than to liberate, so he cannot bring himself to join in. Maggie pities the hopeless position in which he finds himself, saying, "poor Arthur. You'd like to be hip. But your intelligence will keep shining through"(80).

Arthur attempts to deaden his sense of hopelessness and isolation in two ways, but unfortunately both of them merely increase his pain. Jack Shepherd, who played the character in the original production, says that "Arthur believes that his art will transcend his life and that's the biggest stupidity of all."[9] He tries to persuade himself that his songs are valuable for their own sake, that they will endure. But the way in

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9. "End of the Acid Era," *Time Out*, 285 (29 August, 1975), pp. 14-15.

which the music industry manipulates popular tastes is too obvious for him to take this seriously. This manipulation is exemplified by Saraffian, who "used to wait for some black group to do well in the States . . . like the Temptations, then he says he's bringing them over. Sell out, of course. Except when they arrive they aren't quite the same people they are in the States. They're just five guys he's met in a bar. . . . Who he calls the Fabulous Temptations, then teaches them the songs the real group plays"(61). In such circumstances, the quality of Arthur's songs becomes irrelevant, and as Maggie says, he is too intelligent to believe that *his* songs will survive in this cynical commodity market, regardless of their quality.

Art is one of the main sources of immortality which Shakespeare writes about in his sonnets. The other is love, and this is Arthur's second form of escape — to go running to a woman for solace. As we shall see, this is a selfish solution, because it places unfair pressure on Maggie to be something she is not. Moreover, it does not make Arthur happy either, because his love is unrequited. He tells Maggie, "I can't live without you. I can't get through the day"(80), and spends much of his time looking lovelorn. His intelligence is of no help to him, because romantic ideology is so strong in Western society that even the cleverest people can be persuaded that true contentment lies in an exclusive heterosexual relationship.

Initially, it is far from obvious whether Maggie's "pain" is worth considering at all. Most of the other characters are sceptical about it, and Inch seems to have a point when he decries it as self-indulgent posturing, far less important than the real suffering which exists in the world:

> It's meant to be somethin' ta do with the pain. But wot pain? She can't even remember wot it was 'erself. Somethin' ta do with 'er upbringin'. Well, my upbringin' was three in a bed and jam if yer lucky on Sundays, but I rub along. (55-56)

Peyote is much worse off. Smegs notes, "it's her we talk about all the time, but it's Peyote'll actually kill himself"(63). Certainly, the childhood Maggie describes does not seem to warrant such extravagant suffering, so it can be argued that she is simply a spoiled brat who is determined to be the centre of attention:

> Why do we discuss her all the time? That's why she drinks. So we'll discuss her. You know, so we won't have time to do things like cut our fingernails or make love to our wives. That's why she drinks. So as to stop any nasty little outbreaks of happiness among her acquaintances. (45)

Even Arthur agrees that this is her motivation. He says, "she knows the effect she's having. Even when she's smashed, when she's flat out on the floor, there is still one circuit in her brain thinking, 'I am lying here, upsetting people'"(41).

Maggie's pronouncements encourage this uncharitable interpretation. This speech, for instance, sounds like an application for martyrdom:

> So I go to jail. Nobody is to think about me, nobody is to say, 'How is she these days?' Nobody to mention me. Nobody to say, 'How much does she drink?' Nobody is to remember. Nobody is to feel guilty. Nobody is to feel they might have done better. Remember. I'm nobody's excuse.
>
> If you love me, keep on the move. (85)

But there is a deeper side to Maggie, most clearly evident in this outburst to Saraffian:

> In Russia the peasants could not speak of the past without crying. What have we ever known? (71)

Her idealism is obviously much stronger than anyone realises. She is unable to resolve the contradiction between the conspicuous consumption of Western society and the poverty which exists elsewhere. Presumably, she has absorbed two basic tenets of the counter-culture: the anti-materialism associated with the belief that the acquisitive tendency of modern society creates alienation among its members; and, more importantly, the thesis that "the possibility of producing abundance for everyone has made obsolete the old distinctions of class and power, based on access to scarce resources."[10]

Of course, the other characters would not understand this, especially the working class ones, for whom prosperity is a thing to be desired rather than feared. So Maggie spreads a substantial smoke-screen to protect her real feelings. Saraffian tells Smegs that she reveals all the details of her affair with Arthur "to make you think it didn't matter to her. That's why she told you. As a hedge against disaster. Like her whole life"(63).[11] This cynical façade is designed to fool herself as much as others; she *pretends* that she has no principles, in the hope that this will make it easier to bear when things go wrong. Her background *is* at the root of her suffering, but because it was so *good*, not because it was so *bad*. Given the past and present unhappiness throughout the world, such affluence as hers seems so immoral that she is racked with guilt.

Maggie adopts several other stratagems in order to cope with this guilt. Some of these are at odds with one another, and none of them is satisfactory. The most obvious is alcohol; she holds up a whisky bottle and tells the audience, "this is a depressant. I take it to get depressed"(53). Another is a kind of transcendental

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[10]. Bouchier, p. 7.

[11]. Saraffian is much more astute about the other characters' motives than his role allows, which suggests that he often acts simply as Hare's mouthpiece. It is a weakness of the play that there are frequent speeches which, as Charles Marowitz points out, "make verbally explicit what the action ought to be implying." ("New Playwrights Stir The British Stage," *New York Times*, 20 June, 1976, Sec. II, p. 12, col. 1.)

mysticism, in which reality exists on another plane, so that what happens in this world is not important. She uses this only briefly, after she has been sacked from the band:

> SARAFFIAN: Are you hurt?
>
> MAGGIE: Not in my overself.
>
> SARAFFIAN: What does your overself say?
>
> MAGGIE: My overself says: everything's O. K. (68)

It is clear that she is hurt, however, and that her overself will not protect her. In any case, when she accuses Saraffian, "you don't believe a single word I say," he replies, "no. Nor do you"(70).

Her normal medicine is her deliberate unpleasantness. This is more than just a means of keeping people at arm's length. Arthur is not too far wide of the mark when he says, "her problem is: she's frightened of being happy"(86). This echoes a very interesting comment by Hare:

> I didn't understand masochism. Suddenly I was very struck with the thought of somebody living a life in which they avoided all opportunities of being happy. It wasn't that they couldn't find themselves, or relate or any of those boring things that people said in the fifties and sixties, it was because they were actually frightened of being happy because they felt it was wrong. I think this is a fact about living in the West, in this part of the century. People are conscious of the absurdly over-privileged lives they've led, that nothing has ever been really difficult for them.[12]

Maggie feels that she doesn't *deserve* to be happy. There is no rhyme nor reason to this, since she is not to blame for being born into a middle-class family, but Marcuse remarks how often "the unreasonable severity of the superego of the neurotic personality, the unconscious sense of guilt and the unconscious need for punishment, seem to be out of proportion with the actual 'sinful' impulses of the individual."[13] She loathes herself, and does her best to ensure that everyone else loathes her as well. This self-destructive behaviour is a form of flagellation, which she hopes will purge her of her sin and make her a better person.

But there are limits to her desire for punishment. When Saraffian explains to her that the band "stashed all their stuff in your bag. That means the bust sort of settles on you"(72) she goes very quiet. There is a difference between punishing herself for a crime which she subconsciously believes she has committed, and being punished by someone else for a crime which she knows she has not. Just as Saraffian is telling

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12. "End of the Acid Era," p. 15.

13. *Eros and Civilization*, p. 55. "Neurotic" should not be regarded as a derogatory term here; as we saw in *Plenty*, neuroses are defined in accordance with the social norm, and the "neurotic" individual may even be morally superior to his or her peers.

Arthur that "she doesn't seem to mind"(78), Randolph comes in with the news that she is burning down the dinner tent. Very soon afterwards, she has persuaded herself that she will be sent to prison not for narcotics but for arson. She says, "I just wanted to go to jail"(84). Although this *looks* like more masochistic behaviour, there is a sense in which it is a positive act, as Hare implies in this passage:

> In *Teeth 'n' Smiles* a girl chooses to go to prison because it will give her an experience of suffering which is bound in her eyes to be *more worthwhile than the life she could lead outside*: not one English critic could bring himself to mention this central event in the play, its plausibility, its implications. It was beyond their scope to engage with such an idea. And yet, how many people here have close friends who have taken control of their own lives, only to destroy them?[14]

By remaining one of society's outsiders, Maggie can feel that that she is staying true to her principles, and retain a measure of self-respect.

Hare suggests that this refusal of orthodoxy has always been part of her motivation when he says that some people, "like Maggie, . . . try for pure action which just moves you on into the next square."[15] Similarly, Maggie tells Saraffian that "somebody's got to keep on the move"(84). She is not simply trying to keep herself busy so that she can avoid reflecting on her own perceived inadequacy. Nor is she trying to maintain the momentum of the revolution, much as she would like to, because her action is undirected and politically useless. The real reason for her frenetic lifestyle is that she is determined to avoid the kind of slow death which Arthur fears, the passive acceptance of everything which they have rejected so fiercely for years. In this she is very similar to Susan Traherne, who could not face Brock's spiritual stagnation. Both women's unconventional and apparently self-destructive behaviour is a protest against the dreadful conformity that they see around them:

> It's just possible anywhere, any time to decide to be a tragic figure. It's just an absolute determination to go down. The reasons are arbitrary, it may almost be pride, just not wanting to be like everyone else. I think you can die to avoid cliché. And you can let people die to avoid cliché. (46)

Although Maggie does not die to avoid cliché, she does go to prison. Her sense of tragedy is quite close to Arthur's idea of transcendence through art; she feels that her life will have some value if it is "aesthetically pleasing," though value for whom is not clear.

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14. "Lecture," pp. 68-69; my italics.
15. "End of the Acid Era," p. 15.

Behaviour which seems self-destructive is not necessarily so, at least not in the eyes of the the person concerned. This is in accordance with Freud's "death instinct," which, according to Marcuse, is "destructiveness not for its own sake, but for the relief of tension. The descent toward death is an unconscious flight from pain and want. It is an expression of the eternal struggle against suffering and repression."[16] Maggie ruins her life not just because of her guilt, but because there is a kind of peace to be gained from doing so, a peace which she may find in prison. This is also the significance of Arthur's story about a member of a "very loud" band:

> I said to him, why the hell don't you wear muffs? In eighteen months you're going to be stone deaf. He said: that's why we play so loud. The louder we play, the sooner we won't be able to hear. (88)

The paradox is that self-destructive behaviour can bring contentment. Hare does not, however, regard the death instinct as an innate characteristic of the human species, nor is he advocating Maggie's actions as a valid response to alienation. Like Marcuse, his criticism is directed at the astonishing perversity of a society in which this paradox can arise, in which a person can be happier when they have destroyed themselves than they can when they belong in that society.

## III

*Teeth 'n' Smiles* is the first of the history plays to examine in any depth the two areas of patriarchal ideology which Hare is most interested in, romanticism and the dubious "liberation" offered to women by the sexual revolution. Laura submits to the first of these and rejects the latter, while Maggie does the opposite. Both choices, however, have destructive effects. The unsatisfactory nature of romanticism is shown most clearly by Anson's declaration of love for Maggie, which is comic but has serious implications:

> He said your body is like a book in which men may read strange things, a foreign country in which they may travel with delight. Your cheeks like damask, the soft white loveliness of your breasts, leading to the firm dark mountain peaks of your, Laura, now I am dreading which part of my body he will choose next on which to turn the great white beam of his fucking sincerity. Between your legs the silver comets spiral through the night, I lose myself, he says . . . he says . . . how beautiful you are Maggie and how beautiful life ought to be with you. (48)

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16. *Eros and Civilization*, p. 29.

There are several flaws in Anson's love-making, apart from his dismal sexual performance. This Petrarchan blazon has absolutely nothing to do with Maggie's personality, but deals entirely with the body, and even this is not Maggie's body, but some archetype of female beauty. And Anson's thoughts move straight from a quick one "round the back of the Odeon"(39) to eternal bliss. The most important flaw, however, is the way in which the images of mother-figure and prostitute are mixed in this speech. Anson assumes that Maggie will offer him both sexual fulfilment and emotional succour — *her* emotional and sexual needs are completely irrelevant to his romantic fantasy. The fact that Maggie has absolutely no respect for him is no impediment to his vision of a match made in heaven.

Arthur, of course, is far more sophisticated than Anson, but the juxtaposition of the two suitors indicates that they are not as far apart as they might seem. If Anson's romanticism comes directly from Elizabethan sonnets, Arthur's has affinities with that of John Donne:

> The first day they met he drove her to the north of Scotland. The northern sky was wide and open so that strange Hebridean light came through white blinds on to their bed in a perfect square. A perfect white square in a dark hotel room. And they felt that first night they were almost not in the world at all. (63)

This feeling that the rest of the world ceases to matter while he is with his lover is reminiscent of "The Good Morrow": "For love, all love of other sights controules,/ And makes one little roome, an every where."[17] Saraffian goes on to say that "Arthur is obsessed. What happened in rooms. On trains. The telegram she sent. Some pair of shoes. Everything"(63). Maggie makes him unhappy because of the way she treats him, but he must endure that because he loves her.

At the end of the play, even Arthur acknowledges that his romanticism is not as harmless as it appears, when he sings, "my funny little ways/ Have got the others in a mess"(89). Maggie provides the most powerful antidote to romanticism, however. She admits that she was once as romantic as Arthur:

> God, how I used to love that man. . . . He used to make me feel good, you know, he made me want to curl up foetal. (49)

The decline in her love for him is, she claims, caused as much by a change in Arthur as by a change in herself:

> ARTHUR: You said you loved me.
>
> MAGGIE: I did. I did love you. I loved you the way you used to be.

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17. C. A. Patrides, ed., *The Complete English Poems of John Donne* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1985), p. 49.

ARTHUR: But it's you that's made me the way I am now.

MAGGIE: I know. That's what's called irony. (80)

This is not entirely accurate, however. Arthur's romantic dependence may have increased with the failure of the revolution, making him a less attractive partner, but the real change is in Maggie's perception of him.

When she recounts how she and Arthur met, Maggie describes herself as the heroine of George du Maurier's *Trilby* and him as Svengali (or Frankenstein), saying, "he invents me"(38). The monster which Arthur creates is that of political awareness. The change in Maggie is dramatic; there is a huge difference between "let us go a pickin' nuts, fol de ray, to Glastonbury fair, a tiddle dum ay"(22) and "don't let the bastards come near you"(66). This political consciousness is not specifically feminist, but does contain a strong refusal to be controlled by anyone else. One of the notable characteristics of the youth of the sixties was their stout individualism, their determination to "do their own thing."[18] For some members of the counter-culture this may have stemmed merely from their permissive childhoods, but in the more thoughtful it revealed a respect for humanity which they shared with the Western Marxists from whom they derived much of their theory.

Under the influence of this heightened self-respect, Maggie eventually realises that the walls which Arthur builds around their relationship to keep everyone else out are also walls to keep her in. There is a fierce independence about her throughout the whole play, so it is not surprising that she opposes his attempt to possess her:

It seems so clear. I've finished with Arthur. And I'm fed up with his songs. I'm resentful and jealous and I want to be left alone. And I don't want to look in his lame doggy eyes. (50)

When Arthur says that Maggie is "frightened of being happy"(86), part of what he means is that she is frightened of accepting *his* sort of happiness, based on romantic love. Given the implications of that love, she may well be justified.

This does not mean, however, that Maggie dislikes Arthur, nor that she has totally escaped from the clutches of romantic ideology. Laura says, "she is jealous"(24), and Maggie confirms that, so she probably still loves him. She is resentful of this emotion, but can do little to control it. She tells Saraffian, "I have this sense of arbitrariness you know. Like it was Arthur but it could have been one of ten thousand others"(71). Arthur's presence exacerbates this problem, so Laura has a point when she exclaims, "why does he have to come and see her again, it only screws her up"(45).

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18. Of course, the ideology of individualism has been around for centuries, but for most of the time it has functioned as no more than a spurious justification of the *status quo*. It is only during the periodic bursts of revolutionary activity that it regains some of its original radical force.

Maggie suffers because she cannot resolve the contradiction between two coexistent strands of ideology: the desire to retain her individuality and the desire for love. As she points out, the old tradition of romantic love is not merely a personal idiosyncrasy shared by Arthur and Anson, but is a universal phenomenon:

> All my life I've noticed people in telephone booths, in restaurants, heads down, saying things like, 'I don't want to see you again.' Once you start looking, they're everywhere. People rushing out of rooms, asking each other to lower their voices, while they say, 'You've got to choose between her and me.' Or, 'Don't write me, don't phone me, I just don't want to see you again.' People bent over crawling into corners at parties, sweating away to have weasely tearful little chats about human relationships. God how I hate all that. (50)

Although a love which is not possessive is theoretically possible, it seems very unlikely in the society in which Maggie lives. If everyone regards love in this romantic light, and if she rejects romanticism, then she is destined to face a life without love. There seems to be no way of resolving this impasse.

This causes Maggie to complain bitterly about the prevalent social attitudes, asking, "where did we get this idea that one human being's more interesting than another?"(71) Her general disgust at herself and the world, already severe as a result of her guilt about her comfortable background, is increased by this psychological tension:

> I say, there are no great, there is no beautiful, there is only the thin filth of getting old, the thin layer of filth that gets to cover everything. (49)

So Maggie faces two major problems, caused by ideological contradictions in each of the two main structures of oppression which Hare considers.

A link between the two problems is found in Maggie's sexual activity. On one level, this is clearly directed against Arthur's (and her own) romanticism. It is easy to understand why she does not stay with one sexual partner for very long, because men can quickly become territorial:

> Gotta reputation as a
> One night stand
> Kinda precious too
> If you let a greaser
> Stay another night
> They're gonna get a lease on you (29)

She echoes this just before her dismal sexual encounter with Anson, when she tells him, "I only sleep with very stupid men. Write this down. The reason I sleep with stupid men is: they never understand a word I say. That makes me trust them"(40). If she despises her partners, they are less likely to exert any kind of emotional hold over her.

But this does not explain why she does not opt for celibacy instead. The obvious answer, that this would require the suppression of her sexual desires, is not sufficient, because she must have known in advance that Anson's love-making would be as pathetic as the rest of his social performance, and that she would find little pleasure in it. Yet she seems to feel some compulsion towards sexual activity. For much of the play, she acts as though frequent and largely indiscriminate sex can provide relief from her other problems, in particular her guilt. But this is a myth, albeit a common one during the so-called "sexual revolution":

> Today compared with the Puritan and Victorian periods, sexual freedom has unquestionably increased. . . . At the same time, however, the sexual relations themselves have become much more closely assimilated with social relations; sexual liberty is harmonized with profitable conformity.[19]

Far from being a liberating force, sexual freedom has actually become a new form of social control. Marcuse argues that the real consequence of the sexual revolution has been to "extend liberty while intensifying domination."[20]

This is easier to understand if we compare contemporary sexual mores with those of earlier Western societies. In the past, the sexual instincts were strictly controlled, either through repression or sublimation. Both of these prevent the individual from violating the restraints on behaviour which are required for a particular society to function:

> In a world of alienation, the liberation of Eros would necessarily operate as a destructive, fatal force — as the total negation of the principle which governs the repressive reality. It is not an accident that the great literature of Western civilization celebrates only the "unhappy love," that the Tristan myth has become its representative expression.[21]

The desublimation of the sexual instincts — that is, the freeing of the sublimated instincts back to their original objects — is obviously desirable, if it can be done in a way which will not endanger society while increasing the satisfaction of its members. In fact, Marcuse's main project in *Eros and Civilization* is "to ask whether the sex

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19. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 94.
20. *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 72.
21. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 95.

instincts, after the elimination of all surplus-repression, can develop a 'libidinal rationality' which is not only compatible with but even promotes progress toward higher forms of civilized freedom."[22]

Given the conservative function of surplus repression, it seems that any reduction in that repression is likely to threaten the *status quo*. But the individual is always subconsciously aware that he or she possesses these instincts which are antithetical to society, because "sublimation preserves the consciousness of the renunciations which the repressive society inflicts upon the individual, and thereby preserves the need for liberation."[23] It is possible, therefore, that a controlled freeing up of sexual taboos may actually reduce the anti-social tendencies of individuals within society. This is simply a modern form of the mediaeval Carnival, except that the catharsis is available at any time, instead of being restricted to a few days of each year.

This is what took place during the sexual "revolution," which is usually associated with the 1960s, when the theories of psychologists like Wilhelm Reich became popular (and popularised). Sex was seen as a liberating force, both for the individual — "psychic health depends upon *orgastic potency*, that is, on the capacity for surrender in the acme of sexual excitation in the natural sexual act"[24] — and for society — "that *unity of culture and nature, work and love, morality and sexuality* for which mankind is forever longing, this unity will remain a dream as long as man does not permit the satisfaction of the biological demands of natural (orgastic) sexual gratification."[25] But the revolution had actually begun as early as the 1920s, when it was discovered that sex was a useful advertising weapon. This suggests that Anna Seaton's period of "lavish promiscuity" during the 1950s in *Licking Hitler* is an earlier example of the same mechanism.

The sexual instincts have been released to some extent, but this has been done in a very limited manner; homosexuality, for instance, is still discouraged.[26] The sexual revolution therefore involved a process of *repressive* desublimation, which increased conformity while reducing social tension. The pressure to accept this limited freedom is not very different from the pressure to buy whatever product is currently receiving saturation advertising on television and in the magazines. Presumably Maggie, like millions of others, has been persuaded by the media that sex makes one

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22. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, p. 199.
23. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 75.
24. Wilhelm Reich, *The Function of the Orgasm*, trans. Theodore P. Wolfe (New York: Orgone Institute Press, 1942), p. xxii.
25. Wilhelm Reich, p. xxiv.
26. "Whereas Freud sees sublimation as a deflection of sexual energy from orgasmic release to a non-sexual end, Marcuse argues that this release is 'repressive' if sexual energy is contracted into a restrictive model of sexuality, and suggests that the capacity for full sexual satisfaction is reduced in advanced industrial society." Douglas Kellner, *Herbert Marcuse and the Crisis of Marxism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), pp. 257-258.

happy.[27] This is because "loss of conscience due to the satisfactory liberties granted by an unfree society makes for a *happy consciousness* which facilitates acceptance of the misdeeds of this society."[28] Even if sex makes no difference to Maggie's objective situation, it at least makes it bearable for a while. Although there is no clear evidence for this in the play, it seems the most convincing explanation of her pointless and otherwise incomprehensible seduction of Anson.

It is obvious, however, that Maggie is *not* happy. One reason for this is that there is a contradiction inherent in the sexual revolution of the 1960s, which is the misogyny of the counter-culture. The revolution was largely (though not entirely) initiated by men, and for many young men during the sixties it meant little more than easily available sexual gratification, defined wholly in male terms. The blatant inequality of sexual relations during the decade undermined the supposedly emancipatory function of sexuality. Within the play, this misogyny is most apparent in the way the band treats Laura. Without her practical expertise they would be lost, but she gets no credit for any of this. There is a general assumption among the men that women are only valuable as sex objects. Inch comes in during the chaos saying, "upper-class cunt, it's in a world of its own. Smell my fingers"(73). Sexual "jokes" of this kind are symptomatic of a huge blind spot on the left.[29] The double standard is obvious. Peyote (in drag) is furious when he is propositioned by the rowing eight:

> I told 'em I wasn't that sort of girl. . . . I said I'd smash a bottle in their face. . . . Jus' who the hell do they think I am? . . . I'm not anybody's. . . . I'd rather busk, I'd rather play free gigs, I'd rather busk in the foyers of V. D. clinics than play to these cunts. (65)

The stage direction says that "*he is out of his mind and commands a sudden healthy respect*"(65). He is determined to preserve his individuality, a determination which he shares with Maggie and with most men. Yet it is considered quite natural for women to be constantly humiliated.

Another reason why Maggie's sense of guilt is not assuaged by her sexual activity is that the ideology of romanticism and the ideology of free love are both still powerful forces in society, and she is caught in between them. The strength of the former is indicated by her question, "why are girls who fuck around said to be tragic whereas guys who sleep about are the leaders of the pack?"(69) The latter also exerts considerable pressure, as Maggie shows when she sneers at Laura's sexual reticence,

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27. "Sexuality becomes radically similar to the capitalist form of consumption, in which goods have no intrinsic worth outside the value attributed to them by advertising and the rising scale on which they are consumed." Reimut Reiche, *Sexuality and Class Struggle* (London: New Left Books, 1970), p. 106.

28. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 76.

29. The depth of the misogyny among male sixties radicals is shown most clearly by Stokeley Carmichael's infamous 1964 statement that "the only position for women in SNCC is prone." Bouchier, p. 107.

telling Anson, "you couldn't make her with a monkey wrench"(40). These ideologies are clearly at odds with one another, but Maggie has introjected both of them, although she inclines towards "liberation." She therefore suffers from a contradiction within her own consciousness. The full extent of her dilemma, however, is shown by the fact that these two theories of sexual relations are not only incompatible, but that they are both repressive as well. The alternatives which society makes available to her are both unsatisfactory.

Laura faces the same illusory choice as Maggie, but opts for romantic love instead of free love. It is significant that she shares her name with Petrarch's mistress, because she displays the traditional "feminine" virtues of chastity, fidelity and modesty. She has loved Arthur for a long time, but has had to take a back seat to his passionate affair with Maggie. This is an interesting reversal of the position of the male lover in, for example, Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella.*[30] The exclusivity of Arthur's love for Maggie explains why Laura is shut out of his affections. While this could suggest that Laura's problem is *unsuccessful* romanticism, rather than romanticism *per se*, Maggie's experience makes it clear that she would have found her idyll less perfect than she imagines.

Arthur does "love" Laura in some fashion, though the exact nature of their relationship is never specified. Throughout the play there are hints of an emotional attachment between the two, and Saraffian makes these explicit when he tells Maggie, "Arthur would like to be free of you. He would like to set up a home with Laura"(56):

> Shit, Laura, a man can love two women at once. I've seen it done.
> The human heart. Shall we ever understand it . . . ? (46)

In fact, Arthur does not love two women, but two separate aspects of the same romantic ideal. Maggie represents passion and excitement, which is why he finds her attractive. Laura, on the other hand, is the person who keeps the band together; she makes sure that everything runs relatively smoothly, and fixes most of the practical difficulties. She thus represents security, the mother-figure who makes everything all right — this is why Arthur feels drawn to her.[31] It is also why he blames her for Maggie's dissolute life, saying, "have you let her get hooked? Well? Have you let her get hooked again?"(19) Arthur is more responsible for Maggie's condition than anyone else, but romanticism means "never having to say you're sorry," for men at least, because it is always someone else's fault, and usually a woman's.

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30. A more accurate parallel is with Mary Stuart's *Sonnets to Bothwell,* a lesser-known account of a woman's love for a married man. See Betty Travitsky, ed., *The Paradise of Women: Writings by Englishwomen of the Renaissance* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1981), pp. 193-198.

31. As we saw earlier, Anson tries to cast Maggie in this role, but Arthur is fractionally more realistic.

The end of the play, when Arthur finally rejects Laura, is horrible. Laura is "*having hysterics, hitting the ground*"(87) with her fists, while around her on the stage the other characters do their best to ignore her, just as they have done for the rest of the play. Arthur asks her, "can you stop crying . . ."(87), and then becomes heavily engrossed in conversation with Saraffian. Wilson says, "I don't know why you lot make it so 'ard for yerselves"(87), but this is simply a bemused comment on their soap-opera lives, totally devoid of sympathy. Laura has indeed made it hard for herself, because she has introjected an ideology which offers an implicit justification for the mistreatment of women.

She is also, like Maggie, distressed because of the contradiction between the two dominant strands of patriarchal ideology. While Maggie struggles under the social pressure to be the object of men's romantic fantasies, Laura is oppressed by the pressure to be the object of their sexual fantasies. Her refusal to prostitute herself to Peyote's Preludin-inspired erection makes her the target of scorn and derision, even from the other woman in the play:

> I get sentimental about my body. Maggie. Everything else I give to the band, but the body . . . you know . . . I still like to choose. (40)

The compulsion to sleep with anyone who asks is obviously just as naïve as the romantic compulsion to darn their socks. Both women are trying, in their different ways, to achieve a little happiness, while maintaining their self-respect. This is extremely difficult, however, in a society in which they are damned if they "do" and damned if they "don't."

## Chapter 5
## The condition of the middle class in England: *Brassneck*

*Brassneck*, Hare's 1973 collaboration with Howard Brenton, was the first of the history cycle to be written. Of all the plays, it is the closest to the orthodox notion of a "history" play, being a family saga spanning thirty years and three generations. In fact, it is quite different, both in form and in content, from all the rest (with the limited exception of *Knuckle*, Hare's next play). Although it contains some politically interesting material, its main value lies in the light that it sheds on Hare's *dramatic* development. His earlier work does not show a definite style, ranging as it does from the Stoppardian word-play of *The Great Exhibition* to the vague surrealism of *How Brophy Made Good* (1970). Brenton, on the other hand, had already established a distinctive style, and *Brassneck* clearly shows his influence. For example, the flat characterisation and the grotesque elements have more in common with *Hitler Dances* (1972) and *The Churchill Play* (1974) than with anything Hare has written before or since.[1]

The form of a literary text has a profound influence on its content, and some forms may be incompatible with some contents. For example, many of the American anti-war movies of recent years have failed because they have remained within the confines of the war movie genre. Even *Platoon*, one of the best of them, gained much of its popularity through the tension and excitement of its action scenes. This problem is especially acute for political dramatists, as both Erwin Piscator and Bertolt Brecht realised in the 1920s:

> Simply to comprehend the new areas of subject-matter imposes a new dramatic and theatrical form. Can we speak of money in the form of iambics? 'The Mark, first quoted yesterday at 50 dollars, now beyond 100, soon may rise, etc.' -- how about that? Petroleum resists the five-act form; today's catastrophes do not progress in a straight line but in cyclical crises.[2]

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1. This stylistic difference is symptomatic of political differences. The frontispiece asserts that "in the writing, every scene, every word was jointly worked: there is nothing which is more one of us than the other. The work is indivisible." ("Authors' Note," in *Brassneck*, London: Eyre Methuen, 1974, p. 7.) But Hare says of the play, "it worked on the lowest common denominator. Howard and I stopped short at exactly the point where we began to diverge politically in our approach to the subject." ("Current concerns," *Plays and Players*, 21, No. 10, July 1974, p. 20.)

2. Bertolt Brecht, "On Form and Subject-Matter," in *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. John Willett (London: Methuen, 1964), p. 30.

In this play, we can see quite clearly how Brenton and Hare's artistic decisions are determined by their political philosophy.

Hare writes, "Howard Brenton and I attempted in *Brassneck* to write what I have no doubt Calder would still write far better than we, an imagined subsequent volume *The People's Peace*, as seen, in our case, through the lives of the petty bourgeoisie, builders, solicitors, brewers, politicians, the masonic gang who carve up provincial England."[3] Initially, it deals with the impact of the war on the class structure of small-town Britain, but towns like Stanton do not exist in a vacuum, so the play expands to become a rudimentary account of the broader changes in the nature of capitalism since 1945. The play's other purpose is satiric. It demonstrates what Hare perceives as the increasing ruthlessness of the capitalist system, and is clearly a call for it to be overthrown.

These two aims, increasing the audience's understanding of the nature of contemporary capitalism and exposing the iniquities of the British ruling class, account for the most obvious stylistic feature of the play, the two-dimensional characters. While not exactly stereotypes, these do provide a simple view of the world in which the villains are clearly identifiable. They also aid the presentation of the economic history by reducing the characters to their basic class functions, so that the political, social and financial nature of their relationships is not obscured by "personalities."

The form of the play is suitable for these two messages. But these ideas do not figure strongly in Hare's later work. There are two *other* themes in *Brassneck*, much less forcefully stated, which *do* foreshadow his later interests. As well as outlining the changes which have taken place in British society, Hare is also concerned to show that the basic inequality has remained unaltered. This simultaneous presentation of change and lack of change is a feature of both *Licking Hitler* and *Plenty*. In those plays, as in this, there is a dramatic tension between these two propositions, in that while they are consistent it may be difficult to make them *appear* so to an audience. *Brassneck* is less successful in resolving this problem than the two later plays, because of its emphasis on economic history at the expense of ideology. So after 1973 Hare moves away from pure economics, because of the political ideas which he wants to convey. The complexities of ideology also require more sophisticated characterisation, which explains the move away from caricature as well.

The second theme in *Brassneck* which is incompatible with the style in which the play is written is the presentation of the middle and upper classes not solely as culprits, but as victims as well. This idea is still very tentative in this play, but the seeds of its later development are clearly present. This conflicts even more strongly with the dominant style. The characters are obviously designed to comply with the

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3. "Lecture," p. 66. Hare is referring to Angus Calder's *The People's War*.

satiric intention, as they are too superficial to engage our sympathy very strongly. Hare's usual political purpose in the later plays, however, is first to show how the expectations of modern capitalism adversely affect the characters, and then to make the members of the audience apply the same notion to their own lives. For this to happen, a certain amount of realism is needed; people are not going to imagine that they are remotely like Roderick Bagley. This is the main reason why Hare abandons satire in the rest of the history cycle.

While these four ideas may be *theoretically* consistent, the style which is appropriate for the first two is not suitable for the latter ones. What is interesting about *Brassneck*, then, is that it exemplifies Hare's search for a dramatic medium suitable for his political ideas. By watching him experiment with and reject one sub-genre of political theatre, that of satire, we can understand why he moves towards realism later on, and see how his stylistic development mirrors his political concerns. To some extent, it is the *failure* of this play which is informative.

## I

Brenton and Hare believe that a knowledge of the enemy is an essential weapon in any political struggle. There is a long tradition of this form of didacticism, especially in agit-prop plays. Theatre Workshop's *Uranium 235* (1946) "must count as one of the first anti-nuclear war plays; it was performed within a year of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and tells the story of atomic energy, with famous scientists explaining their theories like music-hall comics."[4] Similarly, David Edgar's *Rent, or Caught in the Act,* which was performed by The General Will in 1972, "was devised for and played to tenants' groups, giving them the information in the [Housing Finance] Act in an entertaining way."[5] *Brassneck* is less specific in its aim than these plays, but it does indicate a feeling that the class system must be understood before it can be overthrown. Because of the vast scope of its subject matter, it is virtually impossible for the play to be historically complete, but it does try to be accurate. The use of documentary sequences between scenes indicates that Brenton and Hare want their analysis of post-war capitalism in Britain to be taken seriously. There *are* omissions, but these do not matter because the authors are not attempting an exhaustive account. They have consciously selected the material which best illustrates the issues they want to raise, and have produced some sophisticated historical analysis.

Their account of the changes in British capitalism since the war is in three sections, corresponding roughly to the three acts of the play. The first act is longer

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4. Colin Chambers and Mike Prior, *Playwrights' Progress: Patterns of Postwar British Drama* (Oxford: Amber Lane Press, 1987), p. 31.
5. Catherine Itzin, *Stages in the Revolution* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1980), p. 141.

than the other two, as there is a good deal of exposition, with the various classes being introduced and the relations between them established. What is interesting about this exposition is that it does not contain a psychological component. The characters are important not as individuals, but as representatives of different classes or class fractions. The authors could almost follow the example of *The Canterbury Tales* and name the characters according to their function: Duncan Bassett, Manufacturing Capitalist; Alfred Bagley, Rentier; Roderick Bagley, Monopoly Capitalist, and so on. This is an obvious consequence of the type of historical survey they have chosen to undertake.

Act One deals with the triumvirate consisting of Avon, Rochester and Bassett, Stanton's ruling class, or at least a section of it. The first two, an estate agent and a solicitor respectively, belong to the petty bourgeoisie, to be precise, the class fraction of independent professionals. Bassett the brewer is a bourgeois, who owns the means of production and lives off the surplus value generated by his workers. This division within the ruling class introduces an important theoretical point. Instead of presenting the class structure as monolithic, Brenton and Hare show that it is fluid, continually changing and forming new alliances. Avon and Rochester themselves demonstrate this fluidity; though petty bourgeois, they are not typical of this class, as they have the outward appearance of "gentlemen." While it is possible that they are richer than they appear, it is more likely that they are members of families whose fortunes have dwindled, so that they maintain all the social appurtenances of an economic class to which they no longer belong.

Bassett is economically stronger than either Avon or Rochester, so he should be the most influential member of the group, despite his manners and accent. It is odd, then, that their attitude towards him should be slightly patronising. This contradictory state of affairs is explained by the fact that although economic superiority is the *greatest* form of power, social status and political dominance are often almost as important. Simply by virtue of being gentlemen, Avon and Rochester retain vestiges of the social and political dominance which they would once have had. Economic, social and political power usually go fairly closely together, but this is not always the case, especially during transitional periods, when one economic structure is giving way to another. The continual battle between City and Court in the early seventeenth century, for example, was a battle for political power between the emerging merchant class, who already had economic control of the country, and the old feudal aristocracy. The arranged marriages between these two classes were an attempt to resolve this struggle;

one side had status but lacked wealth, while the others were rich enough but had to buy their way to the top of the pre-existing social hierarchy.[6]

Bassett's position is similar to that of the seventeenth century merchant. His father, or perhaps his grandfather, must have forced his way into prominence by establishing a successful business as part of the industrial revolution, when trades like brewing ceased to be small family concerns and became factory-based manufactures. To start with, Bassett senior was probably shunned by Avon's grandparents. But when it becomes clear that a new order is going to win out, the more versatile members of the old guard adapt to suit the times; since they cannot beat them, they join them. The result in this case is a "marriage" between Bassett, Avon and Rochester akin to those between the children of nobles and merchants during the English Renaissance.

At the start of the play, however, the emphasis is not on the struggle between two different fractions of the capitalist class (agricultural capitalism being superseded by industrial capitalism), but on a far more profound antagonism resurrected by the Second World War, the battle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. Bassett expresses this when he says, "my father taught me that there is a class war. Which you neglect at your peril. As a brewer he saw it every day."[7] In 1945, Avon, Bassett and Rochester are "all slightly over-excited at the election result"(13). The Labour Party, which is seen as socialist, has gained a landslide victory, and the local bosses are wondering whether their land and their businesses will be nationalised. Political power, at least, has swung firmly into the hands of the opposition; there is, figuratively as well as literally, "a red flag fluttering over Town 'All dome"(12).

This political crisis facing the old order explains why Bagley is admitted to the local squirearchy. He started as a small shopkeeper, perhaps the archetype of the urban petty bourgeoisie, and he made his fortune during the first of the great economic transitions of this century in the twenties and thirties, before the play starts.[8] Although he has money, he is essentially vulgar, and in the past would have been rejected out of hand by Stanton's economic aristocracy. His position is perhaps not too far removed from that of Bassett's hypothetical ancestors when they challenged the hegemony of the Victorian Avons and Rochesters.

When faced with severe threats, however, the ruling class always tries to muster as many allies as it can. The traditional petty bourgeoisie (that is, those members of the class who do not possess Avon and Rochester's *social* advantages) are

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6. See Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558-1641* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), esp. pp. 627-632.

7. Howard Brenton and David Hare, *Brassneck* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1974), p. 12. All further references to this work appear in the text.

8. See Laurence Harris, "British Capital: Manufacturing, Finance and Multinational Corporations," in *A Socialist Anatomy of Britain*, ed. David Coates, Gordon Johnston and Ray Bush (Oxford: Polity Press, 1985).

usually the obvious people for this role. Their interests are antithetical to those of both the major classes, but the bourgeoisie prefer them to the proletariat. By admitting people like Bagley to the Freemasons and the Conservative Club, Avon and Co. can enlist their aid in the class struggle. But Edmunds, the union leader and new Member of Parliament, is aware of this tactic, so it backfires to some extent, by hardening the class antagonism between the two main adversaries:

> I know what you bloody Tories are about. Stuffing local Masonry full o' greengrocer, small trader riff-raff, so that when a certain person drops dead of a certain disease another certain person, slimier than the first, will ascend t' wrapping Master's apron round his upper class twit tin leg. I know what you're up to, Avon. So do up your old school tie. Tight. And 'ang yourself from nearest lamppost. (24)

Avon tries to defuse this hostile situation by nominating Bagley as master of the Lodge. As he tells Edmunds, Bagley is intended as a compromise, a neutral candidate who will allow both sides to regroup and consider their position before making their next move:

> Bagley is by no means a bad person. For either of us. He has — and this will please you, Harry — no visible public school education. But on our side we are willing to pass lightly over this — one's mind has been broadened by the war — for he does now enjoy a sound financial basis in the town. Nothing spectacular. Nothing that will make him too pushy. Nothing to embarrass either of us. A decent, quiet stopgap who I think we will find will plug most of the holes. (31-32)

Although he is not entirely happy with the choice, Edmunds accepts this because he likes the idea of Avon not becoming the Master. This is the first of the changes which Brenton and Hare trace in *Brassneck*. After the war, the ruling class was forced to lower the standards of its traditionally exclusive club as a measure of self-defence.

Of course, they have all made a serious mistake. They assume that Bagley is a member of the old petty bourgeoisie, but he is far more progressive. They try to use him as a buffer zone but soon he has, by his own inadvertant admission, "taken-this-town-by-the-throat"(53). He is quite aware of his ambiguous class position, and takes advantage of it. When he first arrives he even jokes about it, saying to Clive, "still, we won"(12), in such a way that Clive cannot tell if he is referring to the war or the election. Bagley's eagerness to buy up slum housing indicates that he has ambitions, and when his nephew Roderick arrives these become clear:

> At this heady moment. I have some small property holdings in Stanton, a town of 40,000 souls. Houses and rented accommodation I've accumulated over the last three years. But I don't feel I've brought enough to the life of the town. Yet. I'm a landlord. Pure and simple. But Bagleys should be builders. Over the last three years there's been something of a spiral in rents. Which means I've been able to acquire more land. Now as I've acquired the land I've ploughed the money back into puffing you up to the status of Architect. And now I want to marry my land with your expertise. (38)

His description of Avon, Rochester and the rest as "dozy. Divine Right Brigade. Divine Right to build . . . and to be builded over . . ."(39) is quite accurate. Their vulnerability is shown in Act Two, in which we see economic changes that have far greater repercussions for Avon and his cronies than the Labour government which they all feared so much.

This is Brenton and Hare's second point about the changes in the class structure after the war. Bagley and his descendants did not just think dirty — they thought big. Roderick's firm is an international concern, with projects in Hong Kong and Africa. It is also, in Stanton at least, a monopoly. With large corporations becoming increasingly more powerful, there is less and less space for the independent businessperson. There has therefore been a general decline in the status of small capitalists and the petty bourgeoisie. Tom Browne, the communist who ends up as "Roderick's public relations man"(64), makes this clear:

> I know I'm going to go too far, but sometimes . . . working for Roderick is a right bastard. . . . Directly because of the people he's had to mix with. Local personalities, small men, egged on by minor members of the family. Men who once enjoyed some peripheral function, but who are just weeds under the shadow of the great oak tree that Roderick has become. Roderick knows about you all. You don't realize how big Roderick is. Sniggering behind your hands. There is simply no reason why an international business concern should be pestered by the bitcheries of a local hunt, even if Roderick is the Master. (79)

The local personalities are indeed just weeds under the Bagley shadow. Rochester, while still possessing his own firm and therefore being nominally independent, is to all intents and purposes a Bagley employee. This places him in the *new* petty bourgeoisie, as one of "those professionals employed by the state and corporations, who have considerable autonomy over their own labor powers so as to facilitate

creativity (but who have little control over the labour power of others)."[9] A drunken James Avon is reduced to being Roderick's social secretary, a member of the white collar proletariat. Only Bassett, who is another capitalist, has retained some independence.

It may seem strange that Avon's stocks should drop so far. After all, members of his class have survived the economic onslaught of the Bassetts and the political onslaught of the Edmunds, largely because of their social importance. One would expect that they would still be useful to the Bagleys for the same reason. To some extent they are, but these social advantages are less significant than they used to be, because of a greatly increased degree of government intervention in the economy. During the war, the public had come to expect a considerable measure of governmental control. Avon recognises the increased importance of inside information and political influence. When a Labour government is elected in 1945, he makes the most of a bad situation by trying to befriend Edmunds, the new Labour Member of Parliament:

> Now Harry, local affairs in general. And more specifically the business community. Your attitude to labour disputes. And how you can help us in areas where the long . . . arm of . . . government . . . touches . . . (33)

As society becomes less of an old boys' club than it used to be, so it becomes more essential to know what is going on. For that reason, Avon and Rochester find their school ties less useful than they might have expected, and they are supplanted by Harry Edmunds and Raymond Finch. The old guard has lost both its economic and political supremacy, and its social authority is waning as well. Although this had little effect on the upper echelon of the élite, the people who wielded massive power, it did hurt Avon and Rochester, who were big fish in a very small pond.

The next major change in the structure of capitalism illustrated in *Brassneck* is the "managerial revolution," which is shown most clearly in Act Three. This is a natural accompaniment to the growth of huge corporations. Alfred Bagley realises very early that the management of massive companies is beyond one person's capability:

> You'd better tell your Dad to build up his firm overnight. Like a mushroom. Tell him to get some real architects to help him. Quantity Surveyors, get some of those. All the paraphernalia. (45)

He has great foresight, and knows that the methods which have worked so well for him are becoming obsolete. Controlling policy is still the preserve of the owners or the board of directors (who are frequently part-owners themselves), but others take care of the day-to-day affairs.

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9. Albert Szymanski, *Class Structure: A Critical Perspective* (New York: Praeger, 1983), p. 158.

During the 1950s and 60s it was sometimes claimed that this revolution was a benign social force, since the managers did not profit directly from their companies' success, and were therefore less susceptible to greed than earlier capitalists had been. In 1962, C. A. R. Crosland wrote that "now perhaps most typical amongst very large firms, is the company which pursues rapid growth and high profits — but subject to its 'sense of social responsibility' and its desire for good public and labour relations . . . . Its goals are a 'fair' rather than a maximum profit, reasonably rapid growth, and the warm glow which comes from a sense of public duty.'"[10] As Browne describes it, however, it is another step along the road to the "total efficiency" of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*:

> The day is coming when businesses will be run like high security prisons. No action that is not accounted, no gesture that is not cross-indexed, no indiscretion that is not costed and filed away. Piled up outside, cowboy architects and their families, bent politicians and wheeler-dealers, rotting on civic dumps, while inside their walls, teams of accountants roam the grounds with savage dogs, checking each door and the movement of executives from cell to cell. Not for punishment, but for profit. Every item will be valued, every job will be priced. We can't afford less if we're to go on. Making profits. Great Britain Ltd. (93-94)

In this new world of cut-throat competition, only the strongest survive, and Roderick's downfall comes about because he tries to run his international concern as if it were a corner store. Browne complains, "you never understood it, did you, Rod? You never understood what your architect's practice had become. You were a sleepwalker. You never grasped — Dear God, you never even grasped Employers National Insurance Contributions. Everyone was always years behind"(93).

## II

Economic history is only one aspect of *Brassneck*, however, because political knowledge without political commitment is useless. In an attempt to foster this commitment, Brenton and Hare emphasise the increasing ruthlessness which accompanies the development of capitalism. This emphasis is achieved by two-dimensional characterisation. Complex motivation would merely obscure the issues. The dramatic and political effect is increased tremendously by showing the characters as their actions *suggest* them to be, rather than as they *believe* themselves to be. Since ruthlessness is the appropriate psychological trait for monopoly capitalism, all capitalists are represented as heartless and greedy. This is in effect a history of

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10. *The Conservative Enemy* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1962), pp. 88-9; quoted in Miliband, p. 31.

*ideology* in Britain after the war, but the ideology is not presented realistically. Instead, the approach is allegorical or symbolic; the characters simply embody ideological statements.

In the first act, the ideological shift which takes place during the play is presented as a religious revival. When Alfred Bagley is elected Master of the Lodge there is a fantastic scene in which he appears dressed as "Alonso de Borja"(34), who became Pope in 1455 under the name of Callistus III:

> You have turned in your hour of need to an old man. One of the least of you God has made the greatest among you. Sick as we are of the debased, debasing warring factions within the Vatican, yet are we now ready to smile upon the defeated families, ready to receive them into the greater purpose of the greater state, into the divine task of maintaining the sanctity of the Citadel. This is God's work. This I must do. (34)

The parallels between the Borgias and the Bagleys are so strong that they must be deliberate, even if the audience is unlikely to notice them. Both Alfred and Alonso have roles as compromise candidates; Alonso was instrumental in healing the Great Schism in 1429, as Alfred is meant to reduce the class antagonism between Edmunds and Avon. Like Alfred, Alonso passed his power on to his nephew, and then to his great-nephew and great-niece. Even the names are similar: Alonso-Alfred; Rodrigo-Roderick; Cesare-Sidney; Lucrezia-Lucy.[11] The appropriateness of this identification is obvious, since the Bagleys are just as scheming and manipulative as the Borgias are supposed to have been. But in this case the "divine task of maintaining the sanctity of the Citadel" is that godly pursuit of profit which is the duty and the pleasure of the devout Capitalist.

What is new about the business methods which Alfred's reforming zeal imposes on the town? The first indication comes when he uses Clive's fake war wound to blackmail James Avon. Not surprisingly, Avon is outraged, but Bagley explains that he is behind the times:

> New approaches, new ways of looking at things. New ways of organizing public contracts. Now take Hospital. We've all got to put our tenders in, and the lowest always gets the job. But here's the new way, James. We all put our tenders in. But first everyone reveals them to me. I reveal them to Roderick. Who puts in last. And lowest. And wins. (42-43)

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11. See Michael Mallett, *The Borgias: The Rise and Fall of a Renaissance Dynasty* (London: The Bodley Head, 1969).

What Charleson says about the Foreign Office in *Plenty* applies equally well to monopoly capitalism; as fewer and fewer people have access to real economic power, the struggle for it becomes fiercer. The new way is more competitive, and the old veneer of gentility is no longer appropriate. This does not mean that capitalism is becoming more vicious, simply that it is becoming more open about its viciousness.

Almost without his knowledge, Roderick is infected with the nihilism of his uncle and his son. He is shocked when an ice rink built by his firm melts because of a crack in its structure:

> The tower block. In Burnley. When the water ran down the living-room walls . . . of the people . . . living there . . . and they got angry with me . . . and they threw their refuse at me . . . how could I be expected to know . . . it would rain . . . so hard . . . that winter? (95)

In fact, though, his disregard for the people who will use his facilities is essential under the new system, because quality costs more, and high tenders do not win contracts. This indifference towards others even extends to the family circle. When Roderick is about to be charged with bribery, everyone deserts him:

> The Labour Party will whisper down the line. Builders, councils, Government departments will gloss over fat bad debts . . . vast sums you owe will disappear in the fog. Books will be fiddled and invoices burnt the length of the land. Everyone will pay for the privilege of never having been publicly associated with a certain Midlands businessman. The bankruptcy case will vanish overnight so that everyone can sit back and enjoy the view. Of you. Skewered on the one isolated case of fraud. (92)

Friendship, as well as quality, is a casualty in the pursuit of profit — there is no honour among thieves.

The managerial revolution has not softened this tendency towards merciless exploitation because, "like the vulgar owner-entrepreneur of the bad old days, the modern manager, however bright and shiny, must also submit to the imperative demands inherent in the system of which he is both master and servant; and the first and most important such demand is that he should make the 'highest possible' profits."[12] In fact, the greater efficiency of Browne's new system has probably made capitalism even harsher. This is shown by the scene in which Sidney plans the heroin empire which is to revitalise the family fortunes:

> I have a proposition. There is a commodity, sold in occasional market places, in these sad times, the world the way it is, a product

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12. Miliband, p. 34.

> for our times, the perfect product, totally artificial, man-made, creating its own market, one hundred percent consumer identification, generating its own demand, if there's a glut the demand goes up, if there's a famine the demand goes up, an endless spiral of need and profit. Endless profit for all human need is there. Gathering up all emotions in its moneyed path. Hates and loves, jealousies and deceits. True, it kills. But only in the end. So does washing up liquid and chocolate, in the end. And my commodity thrives on dying. The dying and the would-be dead are its market. It's a winner. (99)

Nothing has been left to chance, with market research, feasibility studies and product identification. Alfred's slums and Roderick's leaking tower block seem harmless by comparison. When Alfred started out sharp practice was a luxury, but by Act Two it has beome an economic necessity.

Of course, this moral insensibility was always there to some extent. Alfred, whom Hare describes as the play's "greatest liar," is the most cynical character of them all.[13] The authors' point is simply that this cynicism is becoming more common and more severe. When Clive abuses Finch in 1969 Lucy cannot see what the fuss is about:

> Oh, Clive. Every word you said about Finch is true. He's all the things you say. And worse. A three-legged dog with just enough go. We know that. And Daddy knows that. So what? (81)

Roderick's children have no illusions even about themselves. Sidney is not offended by Clive's statement, "you people are cruel and vicious"(83). He calmly replies, "basically we are a firm of architects. But yes"(83). It is no accident that Alfred and Sidney admire each other. When Roderick bemoans his bad luck, Sidney informs him, "it's nothing to do with luck. It's to do with profit. We could have built in ice-cream as long as we made a profit"(92). Abstract considerations such as fate or morality have become entirely irrelevant in the search for profit. Unlike Roderick, the members of the clan still present at the end of the play have no scruples about "not being a nice person"(89), and this is why they have succeeded.

Irving Wardle writes that "finally what the authors produce is not so much a 25-year family chronicle as a requiem for the age of free enterprise."[14] There is plenty of evidence for this in the play. Sidney toasts "the last days of capitalism"(102), and Martin quotes Marx's statement about the "contradictions inherent in a capitalist system which in the end will destroy it"(95). Hare corroborates this interpretation, saying, "I

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13. "Lecture," p. 59.
14. "Brassneck: Nottingham Playhouse," *Times*, 20 Sept. 1973, p. 13, col. 7.

think that there is a sense of voracious enjoyment among capitalists themselves that these are their last days and that they're going to go down with all guns blaring [*sic*]." But this indicates a youthful naïvety on the part of the authors, as Trevor Griffiths points out in the same interview: "it's been 'the last days of capitalism' several times before. But they've always managed to come up with a neo-capitalism which is twice as viable and flexible a form of capitalism as the last one."[15] Under Thatcher, of course, this optimism has completely disappeared.

There has been a social revolution of a sort since the war, but it is not the benign one which it is often claimed to be. *Brassneck* shows that an interesting ideological time-warp has occurred in Britain, a backwards step away from the social welfare system and the "soulful corporation." It was astute of Brenton and Hare to notice this change as early as 1973, for subsequent events, especially ten years of Thatcherism since 1979, have confirmed their interpretation. By 1988, Michael Billington could write about "the elevation of greed to a national principle."[16]

## III

*Brassneck* also contains two minor themes which become very important in Hare's later work. One of these is the idea that society is still unjust, despite the changes to the economic system. If on one level the play demonstrates that change is possible, by showing the way that society has altered, on another it proves that further change is necessary, by revealing the fact that the developments in the class structure and in the nature of capitalism have not affected the fundamental imbalances in society. This, of course, is a major theme in both *Licking Hitler* and *Plenty*. In these plays, Hare challenges the theory that Britain is more equal than it used to be before the war; in particular, the claim that "the rich are distinctly less rich, and the poor are much less poor."[17]

The arguments against this myth are familiar. The first concerns what Calder describes as the "old business of manoeuvre, concession and studied betrayal," which is exemplified by Sir Andrew Charleson in *Plenty*.[18] Although Charleson is despicable, Browne and Edmunds are somehow worse, since they both profess to be socialists. It is not clear whether they are corrupted by the *desire* for power *before* they enter politics, or by the accoutrements of that power afterwards. The self-interest evident in Browne's claim that he is an "independent communist" suggests the former:

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15. "Current concerns," p. 20.
16. "Where have all the playwrights gone?" *The Guardian Weekly*, 27 March 1988, p. 27, col. 3.
17. C. A. R. Crosland, *The Future of Socialism* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1956), p. 53.
18. *The People's War*, p. 18.

> Look, Harry, you know I want to get into public life. Set myself to work. I can't live my life behind the counter at the Post Office. I want everything I do in my life to have a purpose. (27)

It would be easier to respect his sincerity if we had not just been told that he spends a good deal of his time practising the "meaningless bourgeois game" of golf by "chipping ball down yard into outside lav"(27). Harry Edmunds may have initially possessed more idealism, but if so he has lost it by the end of the play:

> We 'ad a chance in 1945. Finest government this country ever 'ad. But not good enough. Not quite good enough by half. By the end, in rags. What am I now? I know. Don't answer that, 'Arry Edmunds. 'Ow can we ever forgive ourselves? I can't forgive myself. Labour party, the party we all love. (85)

Brenton and Hare's point is simply that power corrupts. No matter what the motives of the new Labour members who entered Parliament in 1945, they were gradually absorbed into the very system they were trying to reform.

Corrupt politicians were not entirely to blame for the failure of the war-time "revolution," however. The second and most important reason was the inherent impossibility of radical parliamentary reform, "radicalism" and "reformism" being mutually exclusive concepts. In *Brassneck*, the resilience of the ruling class is symbolised most clearly by the Freemasons. Membership of the local Masonic Lodge is a prerequisite for any political power in Stanton:

> EDMUNDS. You're going to 'ave to join Lodge, Tom. Won't actually get you on Council. But it won't keep you off. And once you are on, well, Councillors who don't don the apron sometimes find Council slightly 'eavy going.
>
> BROWNE. I didn't know the Masons were that strong.
>
> EDMUNDS. It's not that they're strong. It's just . . . You 'ave to join, that's all. (28)

Even economic power is largely controlled by this clique, as the most favourable contracts go to fellow masons. Brenton and Hare are not implying some kind of national conspiracy, the obverse of the Zionist/Communist paranoia of the extreme right. The Freemasons symbolise the incestuous nature of the institutions of power in society.

In Britain, this clique has not remained inviolable, as many new members are admitted to the Lodge, even Edmunds and Browne. For this reason, the development of capitalism is mirrored by changes in the metaphor. In Act Two the Masons have been replaced by the local hunt, and in Act Three by a private strip club. By commandeering the hunt the Bagley *parvenus*, who are the new aristocracy, are

adopting the pursuits and privileges of the old. (Roderick is Master of Stanton Vale Hunt, just as his uncle was Master of the Lodge.) Although there are significant differences in the hierarchy of each new élite, since the old guard is no longer controlling things, many members of the former ruling class manage to preserve their privileged positions. Bassett and Rochester, for example, are still there at the finish, ready to make a fortune in the drug trade. The crucial point, however, is not who belongs to this closed community which wields such tremendous power, but the fact that it exists at all.

*Brassneck* offers a fairly convincing argument that the changes which have taken place over the last few decades have been largely cosmetic. But this theme is unlikely to be successfully presented *on stage*, because it is at odds, stylistically at least, with the economic history lesson and the satire on capitalism. By concentrating so hard on the radical changes in the class structure (the old petty bourgeoisie giving way to the new monopoly capitalists), Brenton and Hare make it difficult for themselves to argue convincingly that change is constant but superficial. Members of the audience are likely to pick up one or other of these points, but not both. That is, they will leave the play believing either that very little has changed, in which case they may become fatalistic, or that everything changes apart from human nature, which is universally bad.

*Licking Hitler* and *Plenty* share the tension between these twin aims, but deal with it much more effectively, by examining the ideological sphere as well as the economic.[19] This dual approach enables Hare to show the change in the former and the lack of change in the latter. In fact, the main character in each of these plays suffers mainly as a result of the contradiction between her own idealism, generated by social changes during the war, and the absence of genuine improvement in political and economic conditions. This method of presentation makes no *theoretical* difference at all, but *dramatically* it makes it much easier for the audience to understand. For this reason, Hare devotes less time to economic history after he decides that undermining the "phoney and corrupting history" of the school-books is more important than teaching audiences about relatively minor reshuffles in the power structure of the ruling class. Once economic history becomes less important, there is also less reason to persist with the characterisation based on class types which accompanies it.

## IV

The other theme which is hinted at in *Brassneck* and which assumes greater importance in Hare's later plays is that of capitalists as victims, which is introduced in

19. These two plays are probably not entirely successful either, for reasons which I shall discuss in Chapter 9.

this play through the image of prostitution. The authors' *main* aim in including this image, however, is simply the familiar political tactic of mud-slinging. Brenton and Hare want to represent the ordinary business world as immoral. Even the title of the play reflects this impulse: "'Brassneck' is a Midlands word meaning 'cheek' or 'nerve'. It has criminal connotations."[20] The authors make no moral comment on *real* prostitution at all (since Sidney's "girls" in the third act may well be victims of economic necessity), but simply use its conventional negative associations to make a political point.[21]

The metaphor appears in each act, becoming more and more blatant as capitalism becomes less and less moral. When James Avon, outraged at Bagley's blackmail, promises him, "you will never work your will on this town, because you will never be allowed real power. You will never get on the Council," Alfred is unperturbed, replying, "I don't want to run the brothel, son. I just want the girls"(44).[22] The younger generations of the same two families are involved in the next example, when Clive abuses Raymond Finch, the Bagleys' new man in Parliament:

> Raymond Finch. Tory ex-Minister.
> Longtime Junior in Colonial Office. Sometime Senior in Ministry of Housing. When out of office will offer Governmental expertise in Private Industry. Keeps his skills greased. Will offer them around. A worthy man, a worthwhile man to have on the notepaper. Slipping in and out of Government to lend a face everybody knows they know. A respectable man, respected, a blazer for other men to wear. Ministers available, cut out the form at the back of the investor's chronicle. Now Roderick Bagley's accredited Representative, well paid, a man for all notepaper. What kind of man was this?
> Vaseline man. (75-76)

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20. "Authors' Note," p. 7.

21. There is a serious political fault in the play, however, in the presentation of the women. Vanessa Bagley is an ineffectual poetaster with a tenuous grasp of reality, while her daughter Lucy is a raving nymphomaniac. The only other women are a stripper and a scantily clad dancer. Brenton and Hare seem to be indulging in cheap titillation to ensure that the play is a popular success, if not a political one. Given Hare's later efforts to portray women sensitively, this is extremely disappointing.

22. This reveals a major mistake in Avon's view of how society works. He accepts the common but misguided assumption that political control is the only real form of power. Bagley, however, knows that when he becomes the dominant economic force in Stanton everyone else will have to dance to his tune. Like a good capitalist, he is not terribly concerned about who manages the business, as long as he gets the profits.

The Bagleys are not amused, because they emerge, as Lucy says, "as brothelkeepers"(82). By the third act, however, this is literally how Sidney makes his living.[23]

But vilification on its own is not enough. If the authors want to rise above the level of name-calling, they must show *how* capitalism resembles prostitution. It now becomes important to distinguish between prostitutes and pimps. If the former are held in low esteem, the latter are universally despised, because they do nothing themselves and live off the profits of other people's labour. This is also an apt description of capitalists, so it is appropriate that the Bagleys should be shown as "brothelkeepers." Of course, only Sidney is a *real* pimp, but his grandfather's wedding-day speech twenty years earlier reveals the same complete lack of humanity:

> Clever young reporter from the local rag t'other day . . . asked me if I were a nihilist. I asked him what he meant, you know, playing daft. Man who believes in nothing, the youngster said. And do you know what, you good people here . . . I felt like giving him a quid for hitting jackpot. (55)

They are totally indifferent to the feelings of others, and ready to subject them to any degradation which will make a profit. And if the Bagleys are pimps, then it follows that their employees are prostitutes. The middle men Edmunds and Rochester, who sell themselves in the same way that prostitutes sell their bodies, are two prime specimens:

> EDMUNDS: 'Ow do you like working for a strip-club owner, Bill?
> ROCHESTER: How do you like sitting in the House of Lords, Harry?
> EDMUNDS: It's comfortable.
> ROCHESTER: Likewise. (97)

Despite their very different occupations, they are not so very far apart, as Edmunds admits when he says, "we will all 'ave adjacent graves. All of us. After so many years and all the ups and downs, we are destined to rot in a row"(97). What unites them, of course, is their willingness to do anything for money.

The prostitution metaphor is gradually developed to imply that capitalists are unhappy and alienated individuals. Raymond Finch manages to be both pimp and prostitute at the same time. On the one hand, as someone who "keeps his skills greased" and "will offer them around"(75), he is clearly a prostitute. On the other, Clive's reference to him as a "vaseline man" is also accurate, because he encourages

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[23]. The progression in the metaphor mirrors the development of state monopoly capitalism. With increased government intervention in the economy, it is a lot more important for multinational corporations to be able to influence political decisions, so the need to "run the brothel" becomes more urgent.

others to prostitute themselves as well. This is an indication that it is possible to be simultaneously both exploiter and exploited. Prostitutes are traditionally regarded as having no self-respect, since they have sold part of themselves. By applying this image to the Bagleys and their friends, Brenton and Hare imply that everyone involved in the capitalist quest has lost, or rather sold, their humanity. Although still vague, this is a hint of what is to become Hare's most urgent message in the later plays, that the system's beneficiaries have also become its victims.

How this can happen is shown by yet another image, that of drug addiction, which in the third act is linked with prostitution. As the surviving characters are organising their heroin empire at the end of the play, and Sidney is announcing his plan to use his "employees" to distribute the drugs, a stripper wraps a rubber tube around her arm and injects herself. At the same time, the dialogue suggests that the metaphorical prostitutes — the bosses — also need a fix, in the form of money:

> BROWNE. I was a communist in my youth. Now I'm looking for revenge. A revenge on everything I believed in. Count me in.
>
> MARTIN. I can see why I want to go into it.
>
> BASSETT. As a brewer I like to see people smashed out of their minds. Logical thing, greed.
>
> CLIVE. I suppose if I felt anything at all I could think myself round to being disgusted.
>
> MARTIN. I've always dreamt of something that will give me free and wild expression. Like Scott of the Antarctic.
>
> VANESSA. I want to come alive again.
>
> CLIVE. Luxurious disgust.
>
> EDMUNDS. It's oozing. It's all beginning to ooze again.
>
> LUCY. Terrific.
>
> EDMUNDS. And I want to be there. My mouth open.
>
> LUCY. Terrifically hard. And sexy. And money.
>
> BROWNE. Sidney. Count me in.
>
> ROCHESTER. Look at me. Bill Rochester. Naked with greed. I could take all my clothes off. Now. And greed would be blazoned across my bum. (100-101)

They are profit junkies who have sold their bodies, their minds, even their souls for their few grams of surplus value. This is false consciousness of the first order; they have been conditioned to desire something which will destroy them. Or, more accurately, it is the compulsion which is destructive, rather than the object of the compulsion. The love of money, as the Bible says, is the root of all evil. This

distinction between true and false desires (one of Marcuse's favourite themes) is the burden of The Rolling Stones' song at the start of Act Three: "You can't always get what you want/ But if you try sometime/ You just might find/ You get what you need"(87).

Vanessa's poetry, doggerel though it is, reinforces the idea that the characters have been damaged by the system which maintains them:

> How many secrets are concealed
> How many tragic lives are led
> Behind the shutters of Stanton's doors
> Stanton's living becoming Stanton's dead. (68)

Roderick is clearly a victim of a kind, because the others make him a scapegoat so that they will not be dragged down with him. The real sense in which the system destroys him, however, is in his loss of moral perspective. This is shown by his plan to have his wife certified insane so that he will gain control of her money, which may just be enough to get him out of his financial difficulties. It never occurs to him to ask her for it. Even by the bizarre standards of the Bagley clan, this shows a wildly distorted picture of the world.

At the end of the play, however, Roderick's vision is more sensitive and humane than that of the others. When he is released from prison five years later, Lucy regards his "madness" as complete:

> He wants to live in a hut, in the countryside and grow runner beans, and talk to the birds, and be dry and wiry. We're all going to pay for a nurse. (99)

It is ironic that wanting to be nice to people and to commune with nature should be taken as signs of insanity. The moral disorder in contemporary society is revealed by the fact that Roderick has to live among criminals, away from the corrupting influence of "decent people," to learn this respect for humanity. He is actually saner than any of his friends. Like Susan Traherne, he indicates the extent of the alienation of the "normal" characters.

Martin feels the effects of his environment too, as he reveals in this passionate outburst after telling the others that he has given the police the diary containing details of his father's shady business ventures:

> You bloody lamed me. I was used. There was dishonesty. At a personal level. I felt you got personal about me. I was made to feel inferior. I was demeaned. Well . . . bugger. Bugger it. And sod. I've smothered everything for you. My loveliness. You've mutilated my . . . beauty. I'm afraid father's made me cynical. And I'm going away. (95)

He has always elicited more sympathy than the other characters, because he is innocent and slow, and because Sidney's pointless cruelty in Act One is extremely unpleasant. But Martin is not alone; everyone's "beauty" has been mutilated by the irresistible drive for wealth.[24]

All this suggests that Brenton and Hare regard the characters in *Brassneck* as victims, people who have been so corrupted by the obscene desire for money that they have lost everything that makes them human. This establishes a continuity between this play and Hare's other works, despite the stylistic differences. But it also contradicts some of the play's other political messages. By depicting the Bagleys and their cronies as cardboard capitalists, the authors seem to imply that, far from being irreparably damaged by a system which they do not understand, they are enjoying themselves tremendously. The audience is left with the distinct impression that these people are depraved because they *want* to be. Because the play focuses on *economic* factors at the expense of ideology, the stress caused by the introjection of conflicting ideological messages is not readily apparent.

So Hare must choose between satirising the bourgeoisie and showing the ideological impasses into which they are forced by their class position; it seems impossible to do both. As he has become more interested in alienation, he has turned his back on the sort of two-dimensional characterisation which he uses in this play. It is significant that he has written only one other satire: his 1985 collaboration with Brenton, *Pravda*. In 1978, he wrote that satire has become politically ineffective:

> The traditional function of the radical artist -- 'Look at those Borgias; look at this bureaucracy,' — has been undermined. We have looked. We have seen. We have known. And we have not changed. A pervasive cynicism paralyses public life.[25]

In the rest of the history plays he also rejects economic history. After the merchant banker Patrick Delafield in *Knuckle*, none of his characters is directly involved in making money until Tom French in *The Secret Rapture* (1988). Instead, they are teachers, journalists and the like, who support capitalism and benefit from it without ever being involved in the grubby business of commodity production. *Brassneck* is worth examining for the clues it gives to Hare's dramatic development, but it is atypical of and less interesting than his subsequent history plays.

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24. It is interesting that he and Clive, who are the only ones to make any moral judgements at all in the course of the play, have little option but to return to the fold at the end, because the "moral" alternative appears so irrational. This is a clear precursor of Susan's problem in *Plenty*.

25. "Lecture," p. 61. It is worth noting, however, that this argument is based on the fact that the fatalism of the audience makes knowledge alone insufficient, rather than on the incompatibility of two-dimensional characterisation with a sympathetic portrayal of the bourgeoisie.

## Chapter 6
## The Guildford file: *Knuckle*

*Knuckle* is a significant advance on *Brassneck*, written a year earlier in 1973, but it is still not entirely representative of the rest of Hare's work. Like the previous play, it is an attack on the immorality of capitalism, this time using the genre of the detective story to explore the notion of collective responsibility. But, again like *Brassneck*, its main interest lies in the clues that it offers about Hare's development. In this case, these clues concern not the *style* of his plays, though he has moved a step closer to the realism which is typical of his later output, but the *intellectual justification* for his whole programme. The themes which were only hinted at in *Brassneck* are here enlarged upon, questioned and finally accepted.

The fascination of this play arises from a dilemma. Hare is clearly becoming more politically aware, but he is also becoming a member of the theatrical establishment. After working entirely on the fringe, he had *Man Above Men* screened on the BBC in 1971, then *Brassneck* was shown at the Royal Court, and with *Knuckle* he moved into the West End at the Comedy Theatre. In all three of these venues, and the last most of all, his audience was likely to be predominantly middle class. That is, they were likely to hold values which are anathema to most political playwrights, both from the conventional left and the counter-culture of the 1960s. Writers such as John McGrath, who are scathing about the subsidised theatre in Britain, rarely even bother to mention the West End, because it is taken for granted that it is the last place that one will find serious political plays.[1] While this distrust of the mainstream is not universally shared, and is certainly not incontrovertible, it is an issue which must be considered by writers who have become culturally "respectable," such as Hare, Brenton, Bond and Griffiths.

The traditional form of "middle class" left-wing political theatre, exemplified by Shaw's *Widowers' Houses*, has involved an appeal to the audience's consciences. Hare realises that this is unlikely to work any more, given the ideological shift in Britain which is demonstrated in *Brassneck* and assumed in *Knuckle*. The basic premise in both of these plays is that morality is less important than it used to be:

> Capitalism adapts; and in the early seventies was adapting faster than usual to a change of mood in England. Underlying *Knuckle* is the

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1. "The National Theatre is a political statement. In its structure and its productions, it embodies a set of values and assumptions that are demonstrably those of the ruling class: even when it attempts 'left-wing' plays — it gobbles them up into its high-cultural meritocratic man [*sic*]." John McGrath, "Better a Bad Night in Bootle . . . ." *Theatre Quarterly*, 5, No. 19 (Sep. - Nov. 1975), p. 54.

> feeling that there will no longer be any need for public life to be decked out in morality.[2]

Hare himself remains a moralist, however, and to him it is almost incomprehensible that people could see that something is wrong and make no attempt to change it. Sarah Delafield's questions are really Hare's:

> Why don't you share what you've got? Why can't people run their own lives? Why persist with a system you know to be wrong? How can you bear to be rich when so many people are poor?[3]

These questions are naïve, but only because "she expected an answer"(56), not because they are the wrong questions to ask. The problems which Hare faces are these: are Patrick and his kind simply money-making automata with no scruples whatsoever, and if so, is there any way that Hare can persuade them of the advantages of socialism?

Hare's attempt to solve this problem in *Knuckle* can be summarised in the following catechism. Do moral arguments hold force any more? Yes, they are still frequently used in public life. But are the politicians and tycoons who use them sincere, or do they simply parade a few hackneyed phrases when they need a moral cloak for their darker purposes? Yes and no to both questions; capitalists do seem, by and large, to possess consciences, but they also seem to do their best to suppress them. So is there any point in appealing directly to their consciences? Probably not. Is there any other way of persuading them that they should mend their ways? Yes, the solution lies in the fact that they cannot entirely suppress the moral imperatives which they have introjected during their childhood. This means that there is always a subconscious tension between their consciences and their actions. It is possible to show that they are unhappy because of this contradiction (even though they may not realise it), and therefore that they would be better off if they removed it by leading better lives. But even if they can be convinced of this, do they have any power as individuals to bring about change? Yes, because they can educate others, helping to build a counter-hegemony. But should Hare go to all this trouble to save the people who are guilty of the worst crimes in society anyway? The answer to this last question is a slightly equivocal yes.

## I

Like *Brassneck*, *Knuckle* is a familiar account of the brutal reality behind the smooth facade of modern capitalism. The message in this play is a lot more provocative, however. It is not the obvious idea that since the capitalist system

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2. Hare, "Introduction," p. 10.
3. Hare, *Knuckle*, in *The History Plays*, p. 56. All further references to this work appear in the text.

commits crimes against the workers, all capitalists are criminals. Instead, Hare argues that *everyone* is involved:

> *Knuckle* is an almost obscenely constructive play! It says something about it being impossible to live within this system without doing yourself moral damage. That's a huge claim.[4]

In this society it takes money to live, and capitalist money is never pure, because it is all derived from exploitation. Simply by living in society, and accepting what it has to offer, one is implicated in the crimes which society commits. This applies not only to inhuman plutocrats, but also to the ordinary men and women who collect their wages at the end of each week.

Hare uses a traditionally apolitical genre, the American "hard-boiled" detective novel, to present this startling political message.[5] There are some features of this form of detective story which make it especially suitable for political adaptation. Unlike its English counterpart, it usually conveys a tone of gritty social realism, in which everyone and everything is seedy or corrupt. Instead of a single mastermind or a single conspiracy, there can be several different criminals, each working for his or her own ends. The former element creates the unpleasant atmosphere which is appropriate to a social critique, while the latter indicates that criminal activity is not restricted to a few anti-social individuals.

It is the way Hare subverts our expectations of the genre, however, which really distinguishes *Knuckle*. One of the necessary conditions of the detective story is that there should be a victim, since without one there can be no crime to solve. But the play's apparent victim, Sarah Delafield, who at best seems to have been driven to suicide and at worst murdered, turns out to have staged her own disappearance, mainly to cause trouble for her father. The audience will be disappointed at being cheated out of a murder and will (Hare hopes) compensate by paying greater attention to the other crimes in the play than it would have otherwise. The most obvious of these is the fate of Malloy's mother who, although sane, is committed to a psychiatric hospital, because her son has been terrorised into selling her house.

This crime is much more mundane than murder, but Hare's message is that "mundane" crimes like this are going on all the time, and pass virtually unnoticed. If he can force the audience to reconsider the crime, he can also get them to reconsider the criminals. This moves us away from the narrow, artificial world of the "whodunnit" to broader social issues. Instead of a single crime and a single culprit, we are presented with several crimes and several guilty parties. Everyone in the play is involved, in some way, in some crime or other. Patrick Delafield and his absent

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4. "From Portable," p. 113.
5. He cites the work of Ross Macdonald as a particular influence. "Introduction," p. 11.

colleagues in the City are partly to blame for the wrongful committal of Mrs Malloy, and indeed for all the subsequent events, since it was their redevelopment scheme which provided the catalyst for all that followed. Hart is culpable for using his dog in the attempt to terrify Malloy into submission, and Malloy is at fault for succumbing to that pressure, though it is difficult to judge him too harshly. Max Dupree blackmails Patrick by threatening to reveal his part in the affair to his daughter. Curly, despite his protests that arms-dealing is "a perfectly legal profession. Like selling insurance"(43), is responsible for innumerable deaths. Sarah does not make money herself, but she had for many years lived off Patrick's, which makes her an accessory after the fact. And even Jenny Wilbur, the most admirable character in the play, benefits from the sordid business, since when Malloy commits suicide he leaves her the Shadow of the Moon club, part of his blood money for putting his mother in hospital.[6]

With the exception of Sarah telling Mrs Malloy that her house has been demolished, which is motivated by her perverse "idealism," all the crimes in the play are the result of the relentless pursuit of profit. Profit is the life-blood of the capitalist system, but it can only be gained by violence. Edward Bond puts it well:

> We have to understand that not only is capitalism destructive in war *and* peace, but that it is *as* destructive in peace as in war. . . . whenever you walk quietly down the orderly street of a capitalist society you are surrounded by the hidden debris of waste and destruction and are already involved in a prolonged act of communal violence.[7]

It is not simply that the never-ending demand for more and more money creates a situation in which thugs like Hart are necessary. All employers, even the good ones, are robbers and frauds, living as they do on surplus value generated by their employees; by paying thirty hours' wages for a forty hour week, they are stealing a proportion of the workers' labour for themselves. And their employees, who usually have little choice but to take what they are given, are both victims of and accessories to this theft.

Hare makes this notion of collective responsibility explicit in a speech from Curly early in the play, which is motivated by a perverse desire to undermine Mrs Dunning's good opinion of Sarah:

> Sarah and I went to a martello tower on Aldeburgh beach when we were youngish — I think I was thirteen — there was a poodle playing inside which followed us to the top. Sarah — me — we

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6. Once we have found our criminals, we naturally expect them to be punished. But in this case they are not, because it would be romantic and unrealistic to assume that in this world the villains always get their just deserts, so again our expectations are not fulfilled.
7. Bond, p. 17.

> didn't have a great deal in common, but at that moment, together, we simultaneously conceived the idea of throwing the poodle over the side of the tower. I can't tell you why but it was a hypnotic idea. Just to see it fall. So — we lifted this grey thing up to the edge, then we released at either end, at exactly the same moment — it's the firing squad idea — you don't know who's responsible. We felt terrible. (34-35)

The significance of this speech in the play as a whole is that it functions as an analogy with the capitalist system, which operates on exactly the same "firing squad" principle. No single person is to blame, but the dog dies all the same, and all who take part are equally guilty.

In order to force the viewers to justify their own lives, Hare attempts to create a critical distance between the audience and the actors. He tries to unsettle us by deliberately breaking the conventions of this type of cops-and-robbers drama. One example of this is when Curly addresses the audience directly, in several lyrical passages. A more startling effect is when Curly fires a gun directly at the audience. By shattering the fourth wall, this simultaneously reminds us that we are not at home watching an escapist television programme and implicates us in the crimes which Curly has uncovered. William Free writes that "these scenes break the conventions of the 'who-donnit' by acknowledging the presence of the audience and forcing it to assume a direct involvement in the violence of modern society."[8]

Most of the audience would probably want to protest their innocence, as Patrick does when Curly confronts him:

> PATRICK: I didn't condone their methods. Stupid. I was appalled.
> CURLY: You didn't know at the time?
> PATRICK: I run a merchant bank. I sanctioned the purchase — not the method of purchase. (77)

This is a familiar complaint. All the other Patricks sitting watching the play would likewise be inclined to say that they never leave the office, that they just shuffle bits of paper around, that it is not their fault if their employees are "over-enthusiastic." But even Patrick is eventually forced to admit his guilt:

> Both of you did well. You wrung from me the sane [*sic*] confession. You wanted me to say I was degraded. Well . . . . I am. . . . OK? (84)

The authority for purchase cannot be separated from the method of purchase, so ignorance is no excuse, even if it were credible. Hare wants to jolt us out of our

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8. William J. Free, "Mischief and Frustration in David Hare's Knuckle," in *Legacy of Thespis,* ed. Karelisa V. Hartigan (Lanham,MD: University Press of America, 1984), p. 28.

apathy, by forcing us to recognise that it is impossible to be a disinterested spectator to the injustices of contemporary capitalism.

## II

So no one can escape complicity in the communal crimes of modern society. But does anyone care any more? Hare writes that "*Knuckle* is about what morality is and whether it is any use to us in the last quarter of the century."[9] If the bourgeois members of the audience are unconcerned about the suffering they cause (directly or indirectly), then the traditional appeal to their consciences will be ineffectual, because they no longer have any:

> . . . how you feel about capitalists — whether you believe them to be knaves or fools — determines everything you believe and think politically.[10]

If the ruling class know that their privilege is based on the oppression of those at the lower end of the social scale, but persist in their luxury and conspicuous consumption, then they are knaves rather than fools. In that case, it is hard to see how they can be recruited to the socialist cause.

At first glance, this analysis *seems* correct. Curly states quite explicitly that innocence is no longer possible:

> The horror of the world is there are no excuses left. There was a time when men who ruined other men, could claim they were ignorant or simple or believed in God, or life was very hard, or we didn't know what we were doing, but now everybody knows the tricks, the same shabby hands have been played over and over, and men who persist in old ways of running their countries or their lives, those men now do it in the full knowledge of what they're doing. So that at last greed and selfishness and cruelty stand exposed in white neon: men are bad because they want to be. No excuses left. (71)

Towards the end of the play, Curly goes even further, suggesting that capitalists have not only rejected all conventional moral standards for themselves, but are actively trying to eradicate them from the rest of society as well (and probably succeeding):

> Somewhere every so often in this world there will appear this tiny little weed called morality. It will push up quietly through the tarmac and there my father will be waiting with a cement grinder and a

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9. "From Portable," p. 113.
10. Hare, "From Portable," p. 113.

> shovel to concrete it over. It is inadequate. It cannot help us now.
> There are no excuses left. Two sides. Two sides only. (84-85)

This implies that McGrath is right, and that Hare must deny the ruling class any place in the struggle for change.

Hare does not give up hope, however. Although he has written of *Knuckle* that "it's a play about knowing, about the fact that there are no excuses," he believes that this "knowledge" extends also to the moral damage which the ruling class does to itself: "people who are damaged by the system know themselves to have been damaged, and are not ignorant of what they've done to themselves."[11] Moreover, there is plenty of evidence, both within the play and externally, that moral arguments are still employed. In fact, ideology always contains a *mixture* of moral and non-moral beliefs, which are not necessarily consistent. The emphasis has often been on moral arguments, but since the early seventies the balance has swung so that they are no longer the dominant form of ideology. Despite this shift, though, even the most vicious entrepreneur will still offer some moral defence, as Curly does for his trade in devices for killing and maiming:

> Things are actually getting better. The enormous continuing proliferation of arms since 1945 has actually led to a massive drop in the global numbers of dead. So there. I'm not ashamed of the trade, even if I'm a little tired of it. (37)

This speech, familiar from supporters of the so-called nuclear deterrent, contains the assumption that human life is valuable, and hence that any means of preserving it is morally good. The logic is ambitious, to say the least, but the moral content is there.

This use of moral terms is not simply a cynical attempt to manipulate public opinion. The capitalists' ideological arguments contain inconsistencies which suggest that the rich and powerful still believe that moral considerations are important for their own sake, and not just for deceiving others. A good example is this fatalistic exchange between Curly and Patrick:

> CURLY: Tell me of any society that has not operated in this way.
> PATRICK: Five years after a revolution . . .
> CURLY: The shit rises . . .
> PATRICK: The same pattern . . .
> CURLY: The weak go to the wall . . .
> PATRICK: Somebody's bound to get hurt . . .
> CURLY: You can't make omelettes . . .
> PATRICK: The pursuit of money is a force for progress . . .
> CURLY: It's always been the same . . .

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[11]. "From Portable," p. 113.

PATRICK: The making of money . . .

CURLY: The breaking of men. (81-82)

Hidden among the claims that humans are innately selfish is Patrick's brief summary of the theories of Adam Smith, who claimed that if the rich got richer everyone else would be better off as well. "Progress" in this sense has moral connotations. There is an obvious fallacy here, however, since if greed is inevitable, it does not *need* justification. Curly and Patrick are concerned to have the best of both worlds. This suggests that they still feel the need for moral justification, even in the midst of this fatalist ideology; that is, they still feel some pangs of conscience.

The fact that capitalists who have chosen immorality are not totally indifferent to morality is encouraging, because it suggests that most of them still have a conscience of a kind, even though they try to suppress it. If this contradiction between their way of life and the moral values which have been bred into them causes them unhappiness, then the knaves are fools as well, because their unwise choice to ignore those values has brought them suffering. In *Knuckle*, Hare seeks to discover if this is true. If it is, then it may be possible to persuade them that they would be happier in a society in which this contradiction no longer existed.[12]

The main characters Hare considers in his quest are Patrick Delafield and his son Curly. Patrick may once have been an innocent who believed in what he was doing — that is, a fool. He and Grace Dunning regret what they perceive as the moral decline of society:

MRS DUNNING: I wonder why all the words my generation believed in — words like honour and loyalty — are now just a joke.

CURLY: I guess it's because of some of the characters they've knocked around with. (36)

Hare's point about the inevitable evil of capitalism was just as true thirty years ago as it is now, but during the 1950s it was easier to hide from the truth. Patrick says, "you may not believe it. The City of London once enjoyed a reputation for unimpeachable integrity"(79). He knows now that this reputation was false, and possibly knew it then, but the fiction did make it easier for him to retain his self-respect. This is very similar to Raymond Brock's wistful longing for the urbane hypocrisy of the Foreign Office as an aid to suppressing the pangs of conscience among the corrupt ruling class.

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12. Of course, it is possible that the move away from morality will continue, and that at some time in the future it will disappear altogether from the ideological superstructure of society. Then the middle classes would be totally lost to socialism; there would be no internal contradiction in the minds of the individual capitalist, and so the appeal to self-interest would be as futile as the appeal to conscience. Fortunately, however, there is no reason to assume that this will happen.

Now, of course, this innocence is no longer possible. Patrick has recognised the gap between what he has been brought up to believe he should do and what he actually does before the play starts; when Curly forces him to admit his degradation, it seems to be something which he has known about for a long time, but which he tries to keep hidden from others and from himself. But even the pretence of virtue has become more difficult. Patrick tries to continue it by using the panaceas of culture. The bourgeoisie are able to surround themselves with the trappings of civilisation which give the illusion of morality, "the cello and the Thackeray"(50). Cultural facades have long been used for this purpose, as Curly points out when he asks, "who ran Auschwitz? A pack of bloody intellectuals"(35). Patrick sums up his life when he says, "there is a saying in our trade. Or there ought to be. In the City. The saying is: 'The exploitation of the masses should be conducted as quietly as possible'"(44). Charleson echoes this in *Plenty*, with his dictum that "behaviour is all."

For this self-deception to work, Patrick is forced to lead a hermetically sealed existence. Anything which threatens to intrude on his make-believe world is hurriedly swept away. At the end of the play, Mrs Dunning leads him off to bed saying, "we'll try to forget you were ever disturbed"(84). When Patrick criticises Sarah's apparently callous obsession with truth, telling her, "I think everyone's entitled to their own illusions"(31), he is speaking from the heart, because his whole life is based on illusion. Most of the time, he seems to be quite successful at keeping reality at bay. Jenny says that Sarah "was obsessed with her father because he was so complete. Sarah used to say he had a personality like a pebble. There was no way in"(50). Although he is aware of his guilt, he is able to ignore it as long as he is left alone.

But there is a fatal flaw in Patrick's cocoon. Because he has feelings like other people he cannot remain immune from all human contact. His natural affections make him vulnerable, first, as Dupree tells Curly, to blackmail:

> I had something on him. I had Sarah on him. He was terrified she'd find out that he was behind it. He was thinking of Sarah. He paid up. He loved her. (75)

These affections also give Curly a weapon with which to wreak his revenge:

> The time was coming when I'd have to face Patrick. Patrick was no longer perfect. I had found a way in. In the thick, densely carpeted air of a merchant bank, the sound of a slight scuffle and the warm red smell of dog. Glimpsed for a second the implausible face of a man who loved his own daughter. I was in. (76)

This gives a new meaning to the expression, "love hurts." Patrick loves Sarah and cares that she should have a good opinion of him, so he suffers because his profession forces him to do things which would lose her respect.

Of course, it is really his own conscience which is troubling him; Sarah simply acts as a goad. The proof of this is that even in "death" she will not leave him alone, as Curly remarks:

> He's [Dupree's] very hopeful. He hopes she was murdered. Everyone hopes that. Including you. Not because you want her dead. I didn't say that. But given that she's dead you want her murdered because then it's nobody's fault except some poor psychopath and there's nothing anyone can do about those. Whereas if she killed herself she's going to squat on your shoulders for the rest of your life. (42)

He can run from his conscience, but he cannot hide. The other characters — first Sarah, then Malloy, and finally Curly — are continually reminding him of what he knows he has become. He is deceiving himself when he claims that he paid Dupree in order to protect his daughter:

> Who is to set standards? Curly. Who is to lead? You have to be able to believe — my daughter should not be given the chance to doubt — we were honest men . . . We are honest men. She had always abused me. But she had never been able to fault me. I had to buy Dupree. Do you understand? For her sake. (79-80)

It is not for her sake at all. In the same breath he is claiming that he is honest and admitting that he paid hush money so that his dishonesty would not come to light.

At the end of the play, it is doubtful that Patrick will ever regain his former tranquillity. There are only two ways in which he could do this. One is to give up all moral notions entirely, so that his conscience will no longer trouble him because it will no longer exist. Unfortunately for Patrick, he is unable to do this, because the socialisation process which caused him to introject his parents' moral values is too strong. The alternative would be to live in a community of "pebbles" like him, in which everyone else was also trying to suppress their conscience; a kind of capitalist support group.[13] It is not likely, however, that such communities of like-minded, stone-hearted people exist in modern Britain (though the Conservative Party may be one example). So Hare has shown that morality is still a powerful force in society, even affecting those people who do not follow its dictates. He writes that "the whole play deals with moral values, and concludes that there *is* such a thing as moral value. That seems to me quite cheerful."[14] This means that it is possible to appeal to the self-interest of the middle and upper classes on behalf of a counter-hegemony, because the demands of business alienate them from the demands of their hearts.

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13. A third possibility, living entirely alone so that no one will challenge his complacent selfishness, is obviously impractical.
14. "From Portable," p. 114.

Curly provides another example of the continuing power of morality. On the face of it, he is the exact opposite of Patrick. It seems that he has returned, in the best tradition of the detective story, to find his sister's killer and to see that justice is done. But *Knuckle* is also a "family play" and this, according to Irving Wardle, gives rise to an internal contradiction:

> In one sense, Curly has come back to unmask the British capitalist swindle itself. But in another, he is still a little boy aching for a decisive battle with a dominant father. Mr Hare clearly intends the play to be taken in both ways. But the two largely cancel one another out. Either Curly's puritanism, his appalled reaction to his homeland, and his quest are to be taken seriously; or the whole action becomes an adolescent imitation fantasy.[15]

It is true that the path of Curly's life has been determined by his rebellion against his father. In Scene 2 he admits, "it's not justice I'm after"(32), clearly implying that what he really wants is revenge on Patrick. They parted on bad terms and are still on bad terms. If the play is simply about Curly's Oedipal desire to destroy his father and take his place, as this suggests, then in what sense is it political?

In fact, though, Wardle's contradiction is more apparent than real. Curly's Oedipal complex has more to do with *economics* than with sexuality. He is not nearly as opposed to the *status quo* as he would have us believe. Far from wanting to "unmask the British capitalist swindle," he would like to join the Establishment, as this exchange with Dupree shows:

> MAX: He said being back in England made you want a nice job.
> CURLY: I'm looking for an opening certainly.
> MAX: I don't know what arms salesmen usually move on to.
> CURLY: Allied Professions. The Church, you know, the Law.
> (63)

Given his own occupation, Curly can have no grounds for despising his father's business dealings. Hare uses the character as a device for exposing the seamier side of capitalism, but Curly himself is fascinated by the system he is supposed to be attacking.

His opposition to his father's world has always had more to do with aesthetics than with morality. Since he grew up in an age when the corruption of the system was becoming increasingly obvious, he has never shared Patrick's illusions. The confidence trick which Patrick and his cronies were pulling on the rest of the country seemed so blatant that it was indecent. Curly's obsession with his father is caused by the fact that he could never decide if Patrick was a fool or a knave; that is, if he really

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15. "Revenge mission in darkest Guildford," *Times*, 5 March 1974, p. 10, col. 4.

believed his own myth of civilisation and moral probity, or if he was simply a very convincing charlatan. When Mrs Dunning praises Patrick, Curly tells her, "we thought he was a fool"(35). If he is a fool, Curly wants to shatter his ignorance because, like Max Dupree, he finds "innocence unforgivable"(66). And if he is a knave, Curly wants to penetrate his defences, to force him to *confess* that he is a knave. In exasperation he exclaims, "I thought when I came back you might be showing just a little petticoat below your hem"(47). So Patrick is at least partly right when he tells Curly that he is driven by "the need to ensure everyone else is as degraded as you are"(80).

His main motive for coming home, however, is not to destroy Patrick but to emulate him. When Jenny asks him why he returned to England he replies, "I came back because I'm ready. I've grown up"(56). This idea of "maturity" is very important in the play. The most important attribute which people must have in order to succeed in the City is "self-control"(44). Even if they know that their profession is brutal, they must never admit it, even to themselves, because as soon as they admit it their victims will cease to cower before them like frightened rabbits. Curly realises that what distinguishes people like Patrick is their style, and he has been preparing himself to join their ranks:

> Money can be harvested like rotten fruit. People are aching to be fleeced. But those of us who do it must learn the quality of self-control. (55)

He has been practising this self-control by refraining from sex, tobacco and sweets. When Jenny makes fun of him on the beach he gets angry, but tries to model himself on Patrick, saying, "control yourself. Control. I am a pebble. With self-control"(58).

Obviously he did not have that self-control when he was younger. Patrick "made his money with silent indolence"(50), so Curly chose guns, "the noisiest profession I could find"(51). And it quickly becomes evident that he has still not learnt the necessary discipline, despite his claims to the contrary. He admits as much to Patrick:

> Jesus. I try to wipe my slate as clean as yours. Alcohol. Sex. I have left them behind. But I still can't quite manage your state of Zen. I still have a smudge of indignation. You still drive me fucking mad. I left this house because I was sick to death with Lord Earthly-bloody Perfection. (47)

Patrick criticises his heavy-handed detection methods, saying, "you haven't grown up. You'll never grow up until you appreciate the value of tact"(44). Curly even admits himself that Patrick is better at the deception than him, that he is "World Champion"(47). This is one reason why he cannot stay in Guildford.

But even if Curly had become a "pebble," he would still not have been able to remain there. Patrick's barriers are not as effective as they appear, since he loves his daughter, who reminds him of those moral standards which he is doing his best to forget. And Curly lusts after Jenny, who would act as his conscience in exactly the same way. When she rejects him at the end of the play, realising that despite her efforts to civilise him he is still tempted by the lure of the City, he runs back to wherever arms dealers run in times of crisis:

> Why should I feel ashamed of myself? Why should I feel inferior? Why should I feel anything? Jenny would go to the newspaper. They didn't believe her. And, anyway, Sarah was alive. It was autumn again. In the mean square mile of the City of London they were making money. Back to my guns. (88)

Curly's response to the world around him is not primarily an ethical one, but he does still hold a few moral notions lurking beneath that nihilistic exterior. Most of the time he can keep them suppressed, but like Patrick he would find it hard to enjoy his money while there was someone who was always challenging the way in which it was earned.

So Curly and Patrick are very similar, both in their unscrupulousness and in the problems which this causes. They are aware of the injustice of the system they are living in, but neither of them makes any serious effort to change it. Hare suggests that this is because they can, like Liberace, cry all the way to the bank: "I intended *Knuckle* in fact as an exhibition of capitalism's strengths and some guide to its intense emotional appeal."[16] Because of the rewards of capitalism, its exponents are prepared to live with the knowledge that they have done themselves moral damage. Those who attempt to do this are undoubtedly knaves. But the crucial point is that they are fools as well, not because they are ignorant, but because the choice they have made does not bring happiness. Marx talks of the capitalist as suffering from a "Faustian conflict between the passion for accumulation and the desire for enjoyment."[17] Patrick and Curly have chosen accumulation, and both are unhappy. Patrick's wealth has estranged him from his family, and Curly is a loner whose feeble attempts to make contact with Jenny reveal his social and emotional inadequacy. *Knuckle* therefore shows that there is enough evidence of bourgeois *Angst* for it to be a useful vein for a political playwright to tap. If Hare can unsettle his audience in the way that Patrick and Curly have been unsettled it could have a powerful effect.

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16. "Introduction," p. 10.
17. *Capital, Vol. 1* (New York: International Publishers, 1967), p. 594. Quoted in Miliband, p. 33.

## III

So political theatre in the West End is not a complete contradiction in terms. But this raises two further questions. First, should Hare even be *trying* to convert the middle classes to his point of view? In other words, is the self-indulgent spiritual malaise of the bourgeoisie worth worrying about, given all the *real* suffering in the world? And second, is there an appropriate and effective response to a recognition of the injustice of the system? That is, can people do anything to promote a better world, given the apparent powerlessness of the individual in the face of the capitalist juggernaut? If this question is answered in the negative, then *all* political theatre is a waste of time.

It is worth beginning with the second question, because the answer to it will solve the first as well. Like all revolutionaries, Hare advocates "protest against unnecessary repression, the struggle for the ultimate form of freedom — 'to live without anxiety.'"[18] Traditional Marxists are likely to argue that this can only be achieved through a revolutionary vanguard, usually the Party, but Hare, like many of his generation, is sceptical of any social movement which requires the subjugation of the individual. Instead, he derives his solution, like his analyses of the problems, from Marcuse. In particular, he adopts Marcuse's notion of the Great Refusal, which is the "commitment to the feeble and ridiculed actions of protest and refusal,"[19] or even more succinctly, "the protest against that which is."[20]

Marcuse never specifies exactly what form this Refusal should take, but the crux seems to be "a stoical and defiant individualism."[21] The aim is to lead by example, in order to establish a counter-hegemony. Through the characters of Jenny and Sarah, Hare can be seen working out his version of the Great Refusal. The letter which Sarah writes to Jenny at the end of the play sums up his strategy:

> Insist we are degraded.
> Resist all those who tell you otherwise.
> At all costs fight innocence.
> Forbid ignorance.
> Startle your children.
> Appal your mothers.
> Know everything.
> Love everything.
> Especially —
> Decay.

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18. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, pp. 149-50.
19. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, pp. 242-43.
20. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 63.
21. Kellner, p. 279. See pp. 277-80 of the same book for other interpretations of Marcuse's theory.

> Insist on decay. (86)

There are several essential elements of Refusal listed here: knowledge, compassion and intractability. The third of these, having the courage of one's convictions, is not stated explicitly but is implied by the imperatives of the letter. Marcuse writes that people are becoming revolutionary when "they start refusing to play the game."[22]

It is the imperative to "startle your children" and "appal your mothers" which makes Refusal an overtly political act. Knowledge and compassion on their own are quite compatible with quietism. Political *gestures* are therefore very important, because they make explicit one's opposition to the inhumane social system. Sarah's carefully arranged disappearance is not just a cruel trick, but a deliberate plan to make Patrick confront his own conscience. This is why she instructs Jenny to "keep Pat on the flat of his back. On his knees. Keep him confessing. Keep the wound fresh"(86). The Great Refusal consists of continually challenging uncritical acceptance of the *status quo*. Hare tries to issue this challenge in all his plays.[23]

It is not always easy to tell, however, if a specific act of refusal is the result of political and moral conviction, or of self-delusion. Leading by example is not solely a matter of living according to one's lights, because that could easily degenerate into smug individualism. Hare uses the characters of Sarah and Jenny to explore the concept of the Great Refusal. He is referring to Jenny when he says that "the reason I don't find the play pessimistic is because it also contains the most admirable person I've ever drawn, this girl who is meant to be a good person."[24] Jenny's gestures are exemplary, but Sarah, who is less admirable, is equally important, because her development in the course of the play allows Hare to consider what constitutes an *adequate* gesture.

Sarah has always had compassion. Patrick tells Curly that she is motivated by "pity for the world"(80). Her response to what she sees around her is that of "a sensitive intelligence sickened by that which is being perpetrated."[25] She is also implacable, as her father again complains:

> Sarah. Unquenchable. A deep well of unhappiness down which I could have thrown anarchist subscriptions, dead dogs, pints of my own warm blood, I could have turned on my head, destroyed my own life, and still she would not have been satisfied. (80)

What she lacks, at least to start with, is the knowledge to make these other attributes effective. Even Patrick recognises that "those who wish to reform the world should

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22. *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 257.
23. Given his interest in gesture, it is perhaps surprising that Hare does not employ the powerful stage images which Brenton uses to such great effect in *The Churchill Play*.
24. "From Portable," p. 114.
25. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 242.

first know a little bit about it"(81). Yet Sarah, despite her belief that everyone should know everything, is incredibly naïve. How else could she have imagined that any good would come of telling Mrs Malloy that her house had been demolished?

This innocence means that her suffering appears to be that of an unhappy adolescent. Jenny tells Curly that she was "a very pretentious girl," and gives as evidence the fact that "she used to say she'd recognize a moment of happiness because — she remembered having one in 1965, and if another came along, she could compare"(23). Although her self-loathing is real enough, it sounds like mere posturing:

> She thought she was a hateful kind of a person. She used to say she had contracted one of Surrey's contagious diseases — moral gumrot, internal decay. (30)

In fact, this is why no one takes her seriously. Patrick tells Curly that when she started abusing him, "I was reassured. The same old propaganda. The noise of someone who's going to live. The same old drivel. She was bleating again"(83).

Her immaturity explains the failure of her first attempts at rebellion. She has always been obsessed with her father, and concerned to change him. Jenny says that she fell for Malloy because of his resemblance to Patrick:

> Then she met Malloy. A man from her father's world. From her father's class. Of her father's age. A man like her father. But able to be agonized. Capable of guilt. She was enthralled. (50)

Jenny also tells Curly, "she left Guildford to avoid her father. She ran away to Surbiton. Don't laugh. She couldn't gesture as big as you. Venezuela, wherever it was"(25). And Patrick says that when she papers the wall of her kitchen with banknotes she has stolen from him, he "admired the elegance of the gesture. It was perfectly discreet"(45). It does not achieve anything because it fails to shock, and so fails to challenge Patrick's preconceptions.

The inadequacy of "elegant gestures" is further illustrated by Malloy. When he shoots the dog which Hart sends to frighten him into submission, nothing is changed, but he is left with "a pleasurable glow of self-righteousness"(78). As Patrick remarks, there is "a very thin line"(78) in this case between victory and craven submission:

> Peace with honour. That is the phrase. It means surrender. But of a very special kind. With the sweet heart of your integrity intact. (78)

Eventually, however, Malloy realises that the comfortable assurance that one is better than everyone else is actually another form of escapism, since it allows people to enjoy most of the advantages of capitalist society while believing that they are exempt from

responsibility for the disadvantages. This is why, when Patrick meets him later, he is in "the last days of alcoholic collapse"(79), and why he eventually kills himself.

Sarah's final gesture, her faked murder/suicide, achieves its desired effect because she has gained knowledge to go with her compassion. First, she discovers, quite by accident, that Mrs Malloy was committed so that her house could be knocked down to make way for "seventeen floors of prestige offices crowned with an antique supermarket"(68). Later, she learns of Patrick's involvement in the deal, and during their late-night meeting at Eastbourne he shatters her innocence forever:

> I told her some stories of life in the City — the casual cruelty of each day; take-over bids, redundancies, men ruined overnight, jobs lost, trusts betrayed, reputations smashed, life in that great trough called the City of London, sploshing about in the cash. (81)

Patrick has given her knowledge, so he can no longer dismiss her accusations as immature filial rebellion. He believes that she has committed suicide, and knows that he and what he represents are to blame. Even if Sarah's gesture does not cause him to give up his job, it at least forces him to accept responsibility for his own actions.

Jenny, who "sees bad things done and condemns them," is the most consistent example in the play of the Great Refusal in action.[26] She combines understanding of the ways of the world with pity for its victims:

> I see suffering and pain and men not happy with their lot . . . .
> I see heavy scowls and fists raised in anger, and I see tears of sorrow and of indignation. I see men with axes in their backs, acid steaming off their skins, needles in their eyeballs, tripping on barbed wire, falling on broken bottles. That's what I see. (54)

She is also implacable in her opposition to society's norms, and determined to make others so as well. When Patrick offers her "a very good price"(87) for the Shadow of the Moon Club, in an attempt to ease his conscience, she refuses because to accept would be to compromise, to exonerate his guilt. And earlier, when Curly is considering finding a job in the City, despite the fact that he knows how immoral it is, she swears that she will cure him of his indifference, exclaiming, "Christ, I'll make a person of you yet"(71).

While the Great Refusal is not perfect, it may be the best political strategy available. It has some flaws, but *Knuckle* shows that these do not render it unworkable. One of these flaws is that Jenny is still manager of the Club at the end of the play, and so is still benefiting from the system which she so roundly condemns. But this is unavoidable; as we saw earlier, no one who lives in capitalist society can escape responsibility for the crimes which it perpetrates. Marcuse seems to accept this,

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[26]. Hare, "Introduction," p. 13.

when he writes that "expressions of humanity . . . will be marred by necessary compromise — by the need to cover oneself, to be capable of cheating the cheaters, and to live and think in spite of them."[27] Another apparent weakness is that even if the idea of leading by example is consistent, it seems hopelessly ineffective. After all, Patrick and Curly do not give up their immoral occupations, in spite of the best efforts of Jenny and Sarah. But while not everyone has the ability or the courage to be Emma Goldman, each person can achieve something on a small scale, which may in the long run be more effective than trying to take on the whole world single-handed. As Gramsci says, "to beat one's head against the wall is to break one's head and not the wall."[28]

The second main objection to Hare's project of writing political plays for middle class audiences in middle class theatres is that the suffering of the bourgeoisie is far less serious than that of people who cannot afford the price of a ticket. It could even be argued that their suffering is simply poetic justice. Hare is aware of this criticism, because he puts it into the mouth of Max Dupree, who is understandably sceptical about the seriousness of Sarah's emotional traumas:

> I've written stories about this hospital for the national newspapers. One about a man who wrapped his hands in copper wire and plugged himself into the mains. Another who believes there's a colony of rats lodged in his stomach wall. He drinks Domestos. Friend. So if a girl's unhappy because her father sits smiling all day with his arse in a bucket of cream, and because she thinks her brother's a twenty-four carat shark, I don't get very worked up. As far as I'm concerned she's just ambling round the foothills of the thing, and is unlikely to come to very much harm. (38)

The justification for Hare's strategy lies with the Great Refusal, which is in accordance with Gramsci's theory of educating people for change. The more people there are who want change, the easier it will be to achieve, so it is quite justifiable to enter the enemy camp in search of recruits.

Anyway, there is no difference *in kind* between the sufferings of the bourgeosie and the proletariat, though there is certainly a difference *in degree*. This explains how Hare can have genuine sympathy for some of his apparently unsympathetic characters, at least in the case of the fools — those who are seriously worried by the moral dilemmas of the age, yet who continue to act in ways which are obviously wrong. Of course, it is much harder to feel sorry for the knaves in society, the indifferent political and economic élite, who can see the effects of their

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27. *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 243. Elsewhere, however, he is more severe, suggesting that "only non-integrated 'outsiders' can be a truly revolutionary force." Kellner, p. 277.
28. Femia, p. 190. The quotation is from one of Gramsci's letters from prison.

acquisitiveness on those less fortunate than themselves but who choose to ignore them. Since the distinction between fools and knaves is often blurred, Hare frequently displays an ambivalent attitude towards his characters. There is a tension between his prejudices and his political philosophy. His head tells him that appealing to the self-interest of the knaves in society is a useful political tactic, but in his heart he still despises many of them.

## IV

*Knuckle* is clearly an advance on *Brassneck*, in that it shows a much more developed theoretical understanding of the political issues which dominate Hare's later work. Another area in which this play improves on the previous one is in the presentation of women. Hare had written two plays which in some sense concentrate on women before this, but neither of them were satisfactory. One of these is *Lay-By*, written in 1971 as a joint effort by Hare and six other (male) playwrights. This is an ideologically confused play; although it uses rape, pornography and drug addiction as its subject matter, it is not "about" these at all. Instead it uses them to examine, in a fairly abstract manner, the violence and alienation of contemporary society. Underlying this there is a nasty implication that Lesley, the young addict who is sexually abused by Jack, was "asking for it."

*Slag* describes a pathetic attempt to establish a feminist commune in a small public school for girls. Hare says, "it was the sort of play that I thought I would enjoy going to see — women on the stage, represented as I thought more roundly and comprehensively than was then usual."[29] While his intentions may have been praiseworthy, however, Michelene Wandor is correct when she says that "most of the wit and jokes are at the expense of female physiology and sexuality — and through the three women Hare constructs a montage of frigid, authoritarian, petty, man-hating nymphomania. The play thus becomes a tirade against women and against feminism."[30]

Wandor seems unfair, however, when she uses the early failures to suggest that all Hare's plays are implicitly misogynist. She writes that *Slag* "sets a somewhat ambiguous precedent for his later putative interest in women."[31] This denies the possibility of political development. During childhood, *everyone* imbibes some attitudes which adversely affect women, since they are so firmly engrained in Western society. It must be possible to overcome this brain-washing, otherwise there would be no feminist movement, but some people will take longer to do so than others. A more plausible interpretation of *Slag* is that it reveals Hare's concern about the problems

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29. "From Portable," pp. 110-11.
30. *Understudies*, p. 82.
31. *Understudies*, p. 82.

facing women, but is an immature and woefully inadequate attempt to address those problems. As his political understanding has increased, his portrayal of women has improved.

*Knuckle* attempts to undermine some of the myths which keep women subordinate to men. When Curly implies that it may have been Sarah's fault that she was murdered, Jenny rightly challenges him:

> JENNY: They found a purse on the beach. And a coat. Which is how they know she was there. And inside the purse they found two railway tickets. Returns to Victoria. Which means she was with someone. Which may mean she was killed.
>
> CURLY: Is that consistent?
>
> JENNY: What?
>
> CURLY: Is that consistent with how she lived?
>
> JENNY: Sarah? Sure. Like all women. Hanging out for it . . .
>
> CURLY: All right.
>
> JENNY: Longs to be raped. Is that not what you think?
>
> CURLY: All right. (25)

And later, when Jenny refuses to have anything to do with him because he will not confront his father with what he knows about Patrick's crooked property deal, he calls her a "white-knickered do-good cock-shrivelling cow"(72). Here he is showing his true colours. The reason he finds it difficult to relate to women is not just that his devotion to making money has rendered him emotionally sterile but also, and more importantly, that he cannot regard them as people. Although Jenny is morally superior to him, he treats her as his sexual property, a role which she rejects with an ironic "me Jane"(52). And his main criticisms of Mrs Dunning are that she is neither maternal ("I bet she dabs Dettol behind her ears": 33) nor attractive ("You should see her thighs. Like putting your hand between two slices of liver": 56).

There are still major failings in Hare's account of the oppression of women in contemporary society, however. The most obvious of these is the scarcity of references to the subject. Apart from the few speeches quoted above, there is one long monologue from Jenny, but it is still very much a secondary theme. Since we never see Sarah, there is a strong impression that Hare is addressing himself mainly to the men in the audience. Although Jenny is just as much a victim as Patrick, there is far greater emphasis on his suffering than on hers. If we compare her with Anna Seaton the difference in presentation is obvious. Anna is at the centre of *Licking Hitler* and Jean Travers is at the centre of *Wetherby*, yet Jenny is rather peripheral.

This neglect is symptomatic of a theoretical failing in Hare's treatment of women in *Knuckle*. There is an implicit assumption that the oppression of men is of greater importance than the oppression of women, clearly illustrated in this set piece of Jenny's:

> Young women in Guildford must expect to be threatened. Men here lead ugly lives and girls are the only touchstones left. Cars cruise beside you as you walk down the pavement, I have twice been attacked at the country club, the man in the house opposite has a telephoto lens, my breasts are often touched on commuter trains, my body is covered with random thumbprints, the doctor says he needs to undress me completely to vaccinate my arm, men often spill drinks in my lap, or brush cigarettes against my bottom, very old men bump into me and clutch at my legs as they fall. I have been offered drinks, money, social advancement and once an editorial position on the *Financial Times*. I expect this to go on. I expect to be bumped, bruised, followed, assaulted, stared at and propositioned for the rest of my life, while at the same time offering sanctuary, purity, reassurance, prestige -- the only point of loveliness in men's ever-darkening lives. (66)

The final line of this passage implies that the oppression of women is caused by the economic oppression of workers in the capitalist system. Men turn to women because of the horror of the rest of their lives, so the only way women can hope to be treated as people rather than as sex objects or sanctuary is by helping to end that horror. This has been a common view on the left:

> On the traditional Marxist view, the sex-specific oppression of women is merely a by-product of capitalism and on this view, the most effective strategy for ending that oppression is to focus on overthrowing capitalism, an achievement which requires the united efforts of the working class. Once socialism is achieved, the sex-specific oppression of women can be dealt with.[32]

The blindness of this belief was one of the main reasons for the feminist movement splitting from the socialist movement during the late sixties. Since Hare has never shared the conventional preoccupation with class struggle, it is difficult to see how he could ever have taken this notion seriously. The most plausible explanation is that his knowledge of feminism was still relatively unformed, and that he accepted a familiar but unsatisfactory argument without thinking too much about it.

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32. Jaggar, p. 238.

Both of these faults are rectified in the history plays which follow. There is one error, however, in which Hare persists throughout his later work. This is his presentation of women as the conscience of society. Jenny is an important character in *Knuckle*, but she is placed in the romantic role of moral tutor, attempting to guide the men around her on to the path of righteousness. The same is true of Anna Seaton in *Licking Hitler*, Susan Traherne in *Plenty*, Caroline in *Dreams of Leaving* and Isobel Glass in *The Secret Rapture* (and less obviously of Maggie in *Teeth 'n' Smiles* and Jean Travers in *Wetherby*). Wandor writes that in the work of many male political playwrights, "women become either the conscience of humanity (ripe for conversion to socialist consciousness) or the victim (emblem) of the oppression of Everyman (sic)."[33] It is surprising that Hare does not seem to recognise this gulf, given his later attacks on romanticism. In *Dreams of Leaving*, William is pilloried for expecting Caroline to be his mentor, but Hare appears to be guilty of the same crime.

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33. *Understudies*, p. 83.

## Chapter 7
## Escape from freedom: *Dreams of Leaving*

*Dreams of Leaving* was broadcast by the BBC in January 1980, seven years after the premiere of *Brassneck*, the first of the history plays. Despite this long gap, however, there is a strong link between the two plays, in the form of a dominant image, that of prostitution. In both plays, the metaphor refers to an act of selling, but there is a difference in focus which reflects Hare's changing political concerns. The members of the Bagley clan sold their sense of human decency for money, but none of the characters in *Dreams of Leaving* are rich, and most of them still have some notion of right and wrong. They have sold out because, despite their periodic political and philosophical protestations, they have all, in one way or another, succumbed to the dreadful disease of conformity.

A prostitute is, almost by definition, not his or her own person, but belongs to someone else. *Dreams of Leaving* is therefore a play about loss of "individuality," or "autonomy" — in Steven Lukes's sense:

> In particular, an individual is autonomous (at the social level) to the degree to which he subjects the pressures and norms with which he is confronted to conscious and critical evaluation, and forms intentions and reaches practical decisions as the result of independent and rational reflection.[1]

This quotation indicates the link between loss of autonomy and ideology, since ideological beliefs are precisely those which are not subjected to "conscious and critical evaluation." In so far as the history plays deal with ideology, they deal with what Marcuse calls the "comfortable, smooth, reasonable, democratic unfreedom" which prevails in advanced industrial civilisation.[2] One way in which loss of autonomy manifests itself in *Dreams of Leaving* is in the abdication of intellectual and moral responsibility in the commercial world. The journalists, for example, have given up any idealism which they may once have had, simply because it is easier. Like *Licking Hitler*, this play shows people becoming "deeply committed to the corrupt and meaningless."[3]

Loss of individuality affects not only those who accept myths about the economic relations in society, but also those who accept the existing relations between the sexes. The main plot of *Dreams of Leaving* is the love story involving William and Caroline. This gives rise to two further forms of self-abnegation, both of which Hare

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1. Steven Lukes, *Individualism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973), p. 52.
2. *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 1.
3. Johnstone, p. 193.

first considered in *Teeth 'n' Smiles*. He continues his attack on romanticism and extends his examination of the effects of the so-called sexual revolution of the 1960s. William's puppy-dog devotion is diametrically opposed to Caroline's sexual freedom, but Hare suggests that they are simply different forms of social control. The destructive nature of the two ideologies is exacerbated by the conflict between them: William and Caroline are incompatible because they are looking for different things from their relationship.

It could be argued that this is the first of Hare's history plays in which the ideology of the patriarchy takes precedence over the ideology of capitalism. This change in emphasis may also be why the play has been accused of being unhistorical:

> *Dreams of Leaving* is Hare's final comment on a decade's work because it finally abandons history, abandons the project of connecting the levels between individual and social change and offers instead a vision of total non-communication taken as an explanation in itself.[4]

Like *Knuckle*, and unlike the rest of the history plays, *Dreams of Leaving* does not have a broad timespan. There is a nine year gap between the voice-over, which William is giving in 1980, and the flashbacks to 1971; with the exception of the final scene, the action is all set in the past. This narrow scope, coupled with the failure to relate the events of the play to major events in recent British history, does not mean, however, that it is apolitical. There are sociological reasons for the dilemmas the characters face — reasons which are by definition both historical and political.

## I

Hare argues that prostitution, in its broad sense, is a wide-spread disease in modern Britain. This refers not only to the selling of sex, but more generally to the surrendering of autonomy in society as a whole. This is a serious accusation, because individuality is highly prized in Western society. Most people would agree with William's credo:

> Do you know what I think is the great sin of the world? Surely, it's caring what anyone else thinks. We ought to be able . . . my God, it should be easy . . . we ought to be sure enough just to be ourselves.[5]

But while society encourages the idea of the individual, it discourages individual action:

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4. Chambers and Prior, p. 187.

5. David Hare, *Dreams of Leaving* (London: Faber and Faber, 1980), p. 27. All further references to this work appear in the text. As with *Licking Hitler*, I do not know how far the BBC production differs from the published text.

> The majority of us are supposed to be individuals who are free to think, feel, act as they please. To be sure this is not only the general opinion on the subject of modern individualism, but also each individual sincerely believes that he is "he" and that his thoughts, feelings, wishes are "his". Yet, although there are true individuals among us, this belief is an illusion in most cases and a dangerous one for that matter, as it blocks the removal of those conditions that are responsible for this state of affairs.[6]

Freedom which is only acceptable within certain socially prescribed limits is not freedom at all. The "free world," about which Western politicians are so fond of pontificating, is largely a myth. In fact, the theory of individualism has always had an ideological function.

Liberal humanism, the great enlightenment philosophy of capitalism, arose as a reaction against the blind obedience of the feudal era. The emphasis on the value and the ability of individuals *per se*, rather than just as social functions, was a revolutionary creed in a time when hereditary authority was largely taken for granted. It provided a justification for independent political and economic action by the emerging bourgeoisie:

> In Italy — and in Florence even as early as the thirteenth century — 'liberty' and 'equality' were political slogans; at first they were the slogans of the upper bourgeoisie against the landed nobility, then of the middle and petty bourgeoisie against the *haute bourgeoisie*, and finally of the people against the whole bourgeoisie.[7]

The unfortunate tendency for humanist rhetoric to be adopted by the peasants and the proletariat, during the English Civil War and the French Revolution, for example, made it something of a liability. So the bourgeoisie retrenched, toning down their earlier fervent statements. Instead, they talked of "the greatest good for the greatest number" (where the "greatest good" usually coincided with the interests of the bourgeoisie), and even of "the deserving poor" (that is, the meek, hard-working poor). This demonstrates the limitations inherent in the bourgeois conception of freedom, limitations which Hare is revealing in this film.

But Hare is doing more than merely pointing out that bourgeois individualism has always been a sham and a fraud. Ideology is not static, and the concept of individualism has changed a great deal over the centuries. In order to make the members of his audience recognise that they are not free, despite all the propaganda to

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6. Erich Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1943), p. 160.
7. Agnes Heller, *Renaissance Man* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 5.

the contrary, Hare must expose the *specific form* which this fraud assumed in Britain during the 1970s. His argument follows those of Fromm and Marcuse:

> The rights and liberties which were such vital factors in the origins and earlier stages of industrial society yield to a higher stage of this society: they are losing their traditional rationale and content. Freedom of thought, speech, and conscience were — just as free enterprise, which they served to promote and protect — essentially *critical* ideas, designed to replace an obsolescent material and intellectual culture by a more productive and rational one. Once institutionalized, these rights and liberties shared the fate of the society of which they had become an integral part. The achievement cancels the premises.[8]

If society seems capable of satisfying everyone's desires, then critical thought becomes unnecessary. Contemporary capitalism provides this satisfaction by ensuring that people want only what society can offer:

> The range of choice open to the individual is not the decisive factor in determining the degree of human freedom, but *what* can be chosen and what *is* chosen by the individual. . . . Free election of masters does not abolish the masters or the slaves. Free choice among a wide variety of goods and services does not signify freedom if these goods and services sustain social controls over a life of toil and fear — that is, if they sustain alienation.[9]

Although individual freedom seems to be increasing, it is in fact diminishing, because people's desires are being controlled to a degree hitherto unknown.

This is the specific form which oppression takes in modern Britain.[10] For the characters in *Dreams of Leaving*, disturbing the equilibrium seems not only futile, but self-defeating. William has most of the creature comforts available to him, as well as some of the things which society promotes as luxuries, such as sex, alcohol and gambling. In this climate, it seems that people have no right to be dissatisfied. They are conditioned to believe that if they are worried or bored then there must be something wrong with them. Like *Knuckle*, this play illustrates the intense emotional, not to say sensual, appeal of capitalism, which inclines people to ignore its uglier side.

A favourite example of this decline of individual conscience, for both Hare and Brenton, is the press. Both playwrights have an abiding interest in, and distaste for, the media. Their 1985 play *Pravda*, which concentrates almost entirely on the

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8. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p.1.
9. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, pp. 7-8.
10. At least for the middle classes. The workers still face more naked forms of aggression.

newspaper industry, closes with the line, "welcome to the foundry of lies."[11] While the press is a less central factor in *Dreams of Leaving*, in this play it still shows quite clearly the way people have willingly given up their critical faculties. William is shocked by the discovery that the art market is fixed, but Caroline is only expressing Hare's opinion when she replies ironically, "I can tell it must hurt your ethics. Ethics mean so much in Fleet Street, I know"(17).

The venal nature of the press is made explicit during William's harangue to the assembled journalists, in which he argues that journalists are guilty of prostituting their talents to editorial beliefs about what the public wants and can cope with:

> I mean at this paper we all promote the fiction of nothing very difficult for the people out there. The British public is assumed to be stupid, and in a way that suits us all fine. That's what we offer as our permanent excuse for not actually doing the job very well. (32)

They all know that there is little justification for what they are producing. William's editor, Stievel, admits this when he checks one of William's pieces, saying, "it's fine. It's absolute rubbish. . . . Congratulations. You have the house style"(14). And the story which Xan will write about Keith, the rock star who claims he was wrongly arrested on trumped up drug charges, has nothing to do with what he believes:

> XAN: You know, I mean frankly everyone knows it, British prisons are an absolute disgrace . . .
>
> But I take that story back to my editor, he won't even look up to spit in my face. . . . Redbrick journalism, that's what he calls it.
>
> WILLIAM: I know. . . . They hate our degrees. [*He drinks, watching the room all the time, his conversation automatic.*] And we only mention prisons when there's a rock star. We wouldn't write a word about what it's really like inside . . . (21)

Xan is openly cynical about the material he works so hard to produce. He tells William, "I only write to claim the expenses. It's my expenses they should publish I feel. That's where my wizardry is fully extended. If I could write as I fiddle, I'd be Mencken, I'm sure"(31). This is a clear example of prostitution.

The journalists are still capable of critical thought, but they choose to neglect that faculty. Like Archie Maclean, they are drawn into the system and end up suppressing their intellectual and moral reservations. At times, though, as we have seen, they are aware that they have sold out. This means that there is always a tension, sometimes conscious and sometimes subconscious, between what they are doing and

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[11]. Howard Brenton and David Hare, *Pravda* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 124.

what they believe they should be doing. William, for example, dreads "a lifetime randomly producing something which we all distrust and despise" and "the effects on my person of a lifetime given over to royalty and dogs"(32).

The older reporters also seem to be aware, at least at some subconscious level, of the effect that this deliberate misuse of their abilities has had on them. William states the reasons for, and the consequences of, the journalists' lifestyle:

> Well I can only tell you, I walk down Fleet Street, I look, I go into the bars. There you'll find . . . the retreat into alcohol . . . the smell of bad conscience heavy in the air. . . . Why do journalists all become cynics? Is it really the things that they see? Isn't it more likely . . . the cause of their unhappiness . . . is something to do with a loss in themselves? (32)

Alcoholism was often used as an escape from a sense of loss in the earlier plays, especially by Archie Maclean and Maggie. What the journalists have lost is their self-respect, because they are not doing what their consciences tell them they should be doing.

They are in a difficult position, though, because the society which created that conscience is giving them contradictory instructions. On the one hand, they should all be Clark Kent, fighting crime and corruption wherever they lurk, but on the other hand, no one wants them to create a disturbance. The problem these people face is basically the same as that faced by most of the characters in most of the other plays — the gulf between ideology and reality. The journalists can come to terms with the sort of corruption which Hare has portrayed only by suffering the "loss in themselves" that William mentions. In other words, they can only keep their self-respect by lowering their standards or by fooling themselves about the real nature of their work, as Colin the gossip columnist does when he says, "I don't think we'd call what we do persecution; I've always believed the public has a right to know . . ."(14)

It could be argued that people like Colin, who do not realise that they have given up their individuality, are better off, since they may well be happy in their ignorance. On this view, more effective ideology would be preferable to critical thought. But Hare would dispute this, perhaps quoting *The Faerie Queene*:

> The donghill kind
> Delights in filth and foule incontinence:
> Let *Grill* be *Grill*, and have his hoggish mind.[12]

The Palmer has restored to human form the men whom Acrasia had turned into beasts, and one of them reviles him bitterly for it. But contentment at the cost of one's critical

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12. Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene, Book II*, ed. P. C. Bayley (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 278.

faculties is too high a price to pay. It is very doubtful that someone who has suffered a prefrontal lobotomy is better off, whatever kind of bovine nirvana they may inhabit.

Developments in the media are symptomatic of developments in society at large. Caroline's account of the pricing system for paintings indicates that a similar form of prostitution occurs in the art world:

> Well it entirely depends on the size. When we can get hold of one we look in the price book, there's a charge per square foot; we take a tape measure, work it out like that. (16)

In this case, it is artworks, not people, which are devalued (though the job must have an effect on the people who work in it). Individuality is ignored; a bad Bacon is worth as much as a good one. The paintings are all judged according to the principle of supply and demand, and even this is controlled:

> These are the bins. Mostly they hold this stuff, release it on the market at a certain rate. The idea is to protect any artist they sell. Too much of an artist's work comes available and you pretty soon find his price starts to slide. . . . Who wants to pay top price for a Picasso when there are twenty other Picassos for sale? . . . That's why the galleries prefer dead artists. They don't spoil the market by turning out more. (16)

Art, like everything else, has been reduced to a commodity.

This degradation of beauty is similar to the way in which individuality in people has become undesirable. The individual traits which distinguish a painting become helpful in selling it — Stone uses them in this way when he says into the phone, "our attitude is this: it's a figurative masterpiece and if he doesn't like it let him shit in his hat"(17) — but they have no influence on its value, since this is seen solely in monetary terms:

> WILLIAM: Doesn't quality come into it?
>
> CAROLINE: Of course not. Why should it? That's not our job.
>
> WILLIAM: But if Bacon painted a masterpiece, wouldn't they feel that they had to charge more?
>
> CAROLINE: Good Lord no, what, hell are you mad? . . . Then when he did a bad one, they'd have to charge less. (16)

These scenes show that individuality still has some ideological value, but only as window-dressing. It is helpful in persuading people to buy things but is intrinsically worthless.

Another example of this is Caroline's beautiful black-and-white slides of prostitutes, works of art which are being used as part of the stage show of a decadent rock group. This is like using a symphony orchestra to record a jingle for a tooth-

paste commercial. The band itself is the type to which Saraffian is referring when he says, "it goes without saying that money will separate you from the things you want to sing about." When William goes searching for Caroline at the band's hotel, the stage direction says that "*the whole room is devastated: old meals, half-drunk bottles of bourbon and champagne, drugs, pills, spilt glasses of water, clothes lying at random, a colour television flickering noiselessly in the corner*"(22). They have been seduced by the benefits of success, and it seems clear that their main question will be, like the Who's, "where is the money and where are the girls?"

In fact, individuality can even be dangerous, as Caroline finds out when she gets sacked for running off three extra lithographs:

> I figured what the hell? It's all a commodity. The market's rigged. What difference does it make? . . . Of course the point is they like to do the rigging. Nobody else. I'd broken the rules. (24)

What Caroline has done is to ruthlessly apply the principles of free enterprise, in accordance with the sacred tradition of individualism; after all, the concept was developed to allow initiative of this sort. But individuality has been devalued in people just as it has in paintings, so her action is not appreciated. "Size" and "quantity" are the properties that matter now — these correspond to wealth, power and social position. Caroline, as a lowly employee, is a mass-produced miniature rather than a Jackson Pollock original.

The effects of this epidemic of conformity on individuals are best shown by William. Despite his protestations about "being ourselves," his life is a model of anonymity. At the start of the play, he says, "I pretty soon found a place where I could live and at the beginning girls were easy to meet . . ."(11) He is busily acting out the stereotypical rituals of the young male:

> I managed to get a job round the time I was living with someone called Angela, or thought I was, because she was never there . . . . It was six days before I realized she'd left me and another six before I could get over it. (12)

This is funny but also disturbing, because of the emotional aridity it reveals. We are clearly meant to disapprove of the sterility of this lifestyle.

He is even more of a conformist at the end, when he sums up his life since Caroline "went mad," because he has given up even the pretence of originality:

> Since that time I haven't done badly, I have a family, a very kind wife . . . . The paper has been losing circulation, so of course we've all had to keep on our toes. That situation has been quite interesting . . . though most of the time I'm chained to a desk. . . . Laura and I have had some very good times together . . . holidays, parties,

> evenings at home. Ben is much the most active of our children . . . .
> Ellen, the youngest, was born a bit slow. (40)

He provides confirmation of Erich Fromm's theory about the decline of individuality: "The person who gives up his individual self and becomes an automaton, identical with millions of other automatons around him, need not feel alone and anxious any more. But the price he pays, however, is high; it is the loss of his self."[13] It is no accident that one stage direction describes William as "*one face among five hundred on the pavement*"(40).

His final comment reveals that he is not entirely happy with his lot:

> Our lives dismay us. We know no comfort. . . . We have dreams of leaving. Everyone I know. (41)

There is a certain degree of self-knowledge in this, but it is the self-knowledge of a defeated man. He recognises in himself the same "loss" which he criticised in the other journalists. This knowledge is limited, though, because he admits that he is still unsure about the events of that summer, and about Caroline in particular:

> If anyone now asks me what I feel about these incidents, I can only tell you what I think for myself. (41)

This may sound individualistic, but in fact William thinks only what he wants to think:

> I'd always believed the things she told me, everything she'd said about how one should live. . . . Now it turned out . . . well I was grateful . . . that's what I felt. Thank God she was mad. (39)

Her "madness" means that he can disregard everything she said about "how one should live," just as Brock was able to ignore Susan's criticisms in *Plenty*.

William's efforts at self-deception are not terribly successful, however. He cannot escape from the knowledge that his life has not turned out as he wished, though he has little idea of the causes, and even less of the solutions. Ian McEwan complains that "Hare must be judged by the standards he has set himself. He chose a narrator, and ultimately the film has to stand or fall by what William eventually comes to understand of Caroline, of himself and, implicitly, of us all."[14] But Hare's narrators are rarely entirely accurate. Anna Seaton and Curly Delafield, for example, only achieve partial understanding. McEwan's complaint that William's final remarks do not adequately sum up what has gone before ignores Hare's consistent avoidance of didacticism.

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13. Fromm, p. 160.
14. "Getting out and copping out," *Times Literary Supplement*, 25 January, 1980, p. 87, col. 4.

## II

While William pays lip service to individualism throughout the play, he possesses a deep-seated desire to conform. He attempts to escape the knowledge of this conformity by creating a romantic idyll with Caroline. This is a different manifestation of the loss of autonomy. Although his outburst at the staff meeting goes against the passivity of the affluent society, and so appears to be an expression of moral outrage, it is motivated solely by a desire for Caroline's approval. He is not standing up for what he believes in, but doing what he thinks she expects of him:

> I wasn't speaking to anyone present. I was ashamed. I was speaking to her. (32)

He demonstrates that he has lost the ability to make his own moral decisions, and wants someone else to make them for him:

> I lost my judgement, I had no opinions . . . . Slowly . . . oddly . . . . I lost my eyes. (27)

In fact, he goes even further, saying, "I realize now from the beginning . . . I was never myself when I was with her"(18). By giving up his autonomy he has given up his "soul," that which constitutes his "self."

This is not a new phenomenon. The romantic idealisation of women (in this particular form) arose as a masculine escape from the unpleasantness of capitalism. The Victorian businessman wanted to be able to come home from grinding the faces of the poor and find solace and reassurance. The best example of this type of romantic ideology is Coventry Patmore's long poem *The Angel in the House*, which was a best-seller for forty years from the 1850s to the 1890s. Here is the morally uplifting influence which Honoria, the "angel" of the title, has on Vaughan, the narrator of the poem, when they go to church together:

> And, when we knelt, she seem'd to be
> An angel teaching me to pray.[15]

Men gave up their moral faculties, leaving them to women, because those faculties were incompatible with sound business principles. Of course, this did not mean that they allowed women any power other than the purely symbolic role of spiritual mentor:

> It is safe to say that, far from being a contradiction in Patmore's mind, the combination of angel and vassal seemed to him an entirely natural and proper one, and it would be easy to fill a page with quotations illustrating this point. He believed that the woman's function was to inspire in her man a thirst for nobler moral feelings,

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15. Coventry Patmore, *The Angel in the House* (London: Macmillan, 1863), p. 131, (Book I, Canto 10).

> but he also believed that her contribution to this process took effect at a spiritual, not an intellectual level.[16]

By worshipping women, men could feel loyal to the moral standards they had betrayed, while at the same time keeping women in submission. This, of course, is a form of prostitution, because for generations many men, though certainly not all, willingly gave up their moral autonomy. The conventional role models of romanticism allow members of both sexes to follow the path of least resistance and define themselves in relation to some socially created norm. William is doing exactly that, so Stievel is quite right to put his outburst down to "an unhappy love-life"(36).

The effect of these stereotypes on human relationships has been nearly all bad. William suffers great pain, because Caroline wisely avoids conforming to his ideal vision of her. He becomes a cliché of the love-sick youth:

> Caroline . . . [*Pause*] Caroline . . . [*Pause*] I just had to ring you. It's awful. I'm sorry. I'm in trouble. You know . . . [*A pause. A slight movement from CAROLINE.*] I'm so desperate . . . [*Pause*] I really can't tell you . . . [*Pause. He is beginning to cry at the other end. CAROLINE's shape does not move.*] I'm just sorry . . . I need you. You know. [*A pause. He cries.*] I'm sorry Caroline. Jesus. I'm sorry . . . (30)

This response appears ridiculous because it is both old-fashioned and melodramatic. But these fictions still exist, even if in a more "sophisticated" form. There are plenty of examples in Hollywood movies, ranging from *The Angel and the Badman* and *A Star is Born* to Stanley Kubrick's *The Shining* and Clint Eastwood's *Bird.*

William's romantic longings are bound to be disappointed, because the woman he is looking for does not exist, being merely a figment of men's imaginations. Just as Anson's idolisation of Maggie required his total ignorance of what she was really like, so William's passionate devotion to Caroline means that he completely misunderstands her. Even with hindsight he is still largely in the dark, as he admits when he says, "I never understood why she wouldn't console me. I never understood it. I never shall"(30). And Caroline's account of one of her affairs confirms that he is not alone in having these fantasies:

> So I had to say to him, we had a good night together, why can't we leave it, why talk about love? . . . People seem to want to drag you down with them. Why can no one be content with a night? When it's good? (28)

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16. Fraser Harrison, *The Dark Angel: Aspects of Victorian Sexuality* (London: Sheldon Press, 1977), p. 49.

The Second World War and the sexual revolution of the 1960s made women more resistant to their traditional fetters, but men's attitudes have been much slower to change.

Although men would certainly benefit from the demystification of women, it is women who suffer most from these false images. Caroline fiercely rejects William's attempts to appropriate her for his own emotional purposes, defending herself when he gets upset about her job with the band:

> Come on William, I don't understand it. What's all the grief? What have I done wrong? . . . Why do you think . . . you've barely spent an evening with me, why do you think you're entitled to feel hurt? (23)

She is determined to avoid being forced into the niche which William has provided for her, a hazard similar to that faced by many, perhaps all, women. She realises that she would be unable to have a satisfactory relationship with anyone if she did give in to conventional expectations, but in her continual opposition she is little better off. *Dreams of Leaving* illustrates the emotional sacrifices necessary to maintain her personal integrity.

Caroline's emotional needs are no different from anyone else's, but she is not willing to go through the normal channels (the constraints of the nuclear family) to try to satisfy them. Although she claims to be in love with William, she still refuses to sleep with him; in fact, she refuses to sleep with him *because* she loves him:

> Oh God Jesus William I love you. You're the only man who's ever been kind. You're the first friend . . . the first friend I've trusted. God how I love you. . . . You are my friend. (26)

Kindness and trustworthiness are the two qualities she mentions. This suggests that she is after security and affection, which are not outrageous aspirations. Since sex, in the romantic tradition, has been largely reduced to a proof of ownership, however, she regards it as a barrier to emotional commitment and equality.

Her uncompromising independence accounts, at least to some extent, for her refusal to stay for long with one partner. She makes her position clear in this speech to William, after his display at the editorial conference, when he tries to force her into the restrictive role of moral mentor:

> I never understand it, you say you're independent. You say you're a person who will stand on his own. Yet whenever you do something virtuous, you seem to think you're entitled to come to me and collect some reward. . . . Well that sort of weakness disgusts me. Do what you have to. Be your own man. (33)

This sounds like Hare's view, since she is telling William that he should resist ideological conditioning, but in fact Caroline carries her individualism to an extreme and destructive conclusion. For her, "being your own person" does not just mean standing up for your beliefs without thinking about the rewards, but being totally self-reliant. This is why she is unable to ask for help:

> CAROLINE: I was very hurt. Some work was rejected. I'd had enough. I wanted to go.
>
> WILLIAM: I wish you'd rung me. I'd like to have helped you . . .
>
> CAROLINE: Why would you help me? I'm absolutely fine. (34)

She is also unable to offer any comfort, certainly not of the sort that William wants:

> CAROLINE: You have that look. I really can't kiss you. When you have that look, it freezes me up.
>
> WILLIAM: What sort of look?
>
> CAROLINE: The look that says 'help me'. I'm sorry, I can't. (25)

She is so worried that any act of kindness will be interpreted as a willingness to accept the image of the nurturing female which caused Anna Seaton so much anguish that she is strictly unemotional most of the time. That is why "everyone always used to say she was ruthless"(33). William guesses something of this when he says at the end, "what I always took to be her self-confidence, now seems a way she had of hiding her fears . . . . It breaks my heart that she couldn't reach out to me. If I'd been wiser perhaps I would have known"(40-41). Of course, there is a sense in which her whole affair with him was an act of reaching out, but she could never admit that it was, and he was far too self-absorbed to notice.

So both William and Caroline suffer because of the oppressive nature of romanticism. Their problems are compounded, however, by a psychological contradiction which each of them experiences. Although Caroline has adopted the ideology of free love which emerged during the sexual revolution, and William is an ardent romantic, they have both also introjected elements of the other's ideology. His stallion imitations at the beginning of the play are obviously influenced by the prevailing culture of sexual liberalism, and her child-like faith in him as someone who will look after her is a variant of the protective role of the male in an old cultural tradition which emphasises male strength and female helplessness. This is exactly the same problem that Maggie and Arthur faced in *Teeth 'n' Smiles*. It seems impossible to reconcile these two incompatible ideologies, and the tension which this creates within the mind of each of the characters contributes to their confusion and unhappiness.

Their attempt to combine these contrary positions also explains the very curious relationship which develops between them. Although they sleep together, it is never consummated:

> *Their faces lying serenely together on the pillow, lit only by the street lights from outside. WILLIAM's eyes are closed. CAROLINE's are open. They lie still in the bed.*
>
> CAROLINE: William. . . . William. . . . I'm ready for some cocoa . . . . You stay. I'll make it.
>
> WILLIAM: Good. Good and strong.
>
> [*CAROLINE throws the cover back. She is fully dressed. She gets out of bed and goes to the door, WILLIAM watching.*]
>
> WILLIAM: [*V. O.* ] It was certainly something unusual. . . . But it wasn't something I'd see catching on. (26)

This does not indicate a lack of affection. When William visits Caroline's mother she tells him, "you are the boy. She spoke warmly of you. She was much in love. You were always the one"(38).

The trouble is that they hold very different ideas on the connection between love and sex. Unlike the other characters, Caroline rejects the common assumption that the two go together. It could seem as if she treats William as a sort of brother, but this is not the case:

> Of all the odd things, the one that amazed me, she used to come and watch me, not tell me she was there. . . . She used to say afterwards she'd never desired anyone as much as she desired me when I didn't know. (28)

Although she lusts after him, she keeps that desire firmly under control. William, on the other hand, regards the relationship as incomplete without consummation:

> WILLIAM: Please . . . . Please. . . . Couldn't you just try?
>
> CAROLINE: William . . . I tell you . . . it's my experience . . . . in these matters trying doesn't help. (29)

And he is always hopeful that she will eventually agree to make love with him:

> Always implicit there was always the promise, if I held on, the moment would come . . . . All I had to do was to keep my faith with her, keep on trusting her, then we'd be fine. (29)

He feels that if he could make love with Caroline she would be "his woman," which of course is just what she does not want.

They turn to each other in an effort to fulfil their emotional needs. Unfortunately, however, their friendship is destined to fail, because they hold such

contrasting ideas of what constitutes a satisfactory relationship. Sometimes Caroline acts as if William feels the same way she does, telling him all about her affairs with other men:

> It wasn't a question of actually deceiving me, she told me everything, that's what was strange. . . . She used to talk to me as if I were impartial. Did she never notice she hurt me as well? (28)

At other times, though, she realises that they are living at cross-purposes:

> WILLIAM: Caroline come on, I mean, God, this is stupid. How can you do this? This is just mad. . . . I mean for God's sake you said you'd come home with me. Then when you get here you simply freak out. I mean, come on, do you think about my feelings? I mean, Jesus Christ, will you give me a break?
>
> CAROLINE: I know. . . . It's stupid. I ask too much of you. (25)

Given this basic incompatibility, it is not surprising that they avoid excessive intimacy. William says, "we were always closest when someone else was there"(27), because then the spectre of sex is least likely to rear its ugly head.

It is also not surprising that they eventually part. But Caroline starves after William leaves her. As long as she had some support she could cope, but without him she is totally alone and the struggle for survival becomes too much. Her starvation is not caused by the desire to conform to male ideals of anorexic beauty, but simply by a tiredness, an indifference. This tiredness is apparent earlier; when William goes to break off their relationship, she refuses to defend herself:

> It took a long time. It was mostly silence. Whatever I said, I couldn't make her fight. . . .
>
> I felt disappointed, it wasn't what I wanted, I'd come for hysterics and loss of control . . . (35)

She has been worn out by the constant battle against the pressure to conform, in her public life and in her private life, and she has no strength left to fight. Like Maggie, Caroline shows the death instinct at work, the subconscious desire for peace even at the expense of life itself.

Hare's portrayal of romanticism in this play is essentially similar to that in *Teeth 'n' Smiles*, but the emphasis does differ slightly. In the earlier play, the focus was on Maggie's need to escape from Arthur's romanticism. In *Dreams of Leaving*, on the other hand, we see more of William than we did of Arthur. In other words, Hare devotes time in this play to the negative effects of romantic love on the lover as well as on the object of that love, on men as well as women. This is an illustration of

his wider thesis that everyone, including the exploiters, would be better off under a non-exploitative system.

## III

Romanticism is not the sole interest of *Dreams of Leaving*, however. Although Caroline's behaviour is motivated in part by her desire to escape from William's romantic clutches, this does not explain why she is so sexually active. To understand this we must return to Marcuse's notion of repressive desublimation. Freely available sexual gratification means that people are less likely to rebel against society, because it seems to satisfy so many of their desires:

> In the mental apparatus, the tension between that which is desired and that which is permitted seems considerably lowered, and the Reality Principle no longer seems to require a sweeping and painful transformation of the instinctual needs. The individual must adapt himself to a world which does not seem to demand the denial of his innermost needs — a world which is not essentially hostile.
>
> The organism is thus being preconditioned for the spontaneous acceptance of what is offered. Inasmuch as the greater liberty involves a contraction rather than extension and development of instinctual needs, it works *for* rather than *against* the status quo of general repression . . . .[17]

Sex has replaced religion as the opiate of the masses. If the journalists exemplify one aspect of Marcuse's theory that people are being controlled by the manipulation of their wants, Caroline illustrates another.

Caroline has no time for the liberal justifications which William uses to fool himself that the two of them are fulfilling important social functions. When he claims, "in a way you were making a protest," by illegally printing three extra lithographs, she replies bluntly, "no William. No. I was ripping them off"(24). But her position as rebel is an uncomfortable one, because her indifference towards society's rules and conventions often distances her from her acquaintances. At times, she wants to escape from the responsibility that it entails. Sex has a cathartic effect which allows her to forget her problems for a while.

Caroline does not say just that sex makes her feel better, however. She tells William, "I love more than anything to make love to strangers. It's the only time I forget who I am"(19). The reason for this seems to be that people define themselves largely through the things which separate them from the rest of society. In the past, people have been alienated by the repression or sublimation of the sexual instincts and

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17. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, pp. 73-74.

so sexuality has been an important, if unconscious, feature of each person's personality. Partial desublimation therefore reduces the tension between the individual and society, and reduces the individual's sense that he or she is different:

> To put it briefly, the individual ceases to be himself; he adopts entirely the kind of personality offered to him by cultural patterns; and he therefore becomes exactly as all others are and as they expect him to be.[18]

It is easy to understand why Caroline should want to forget who she is. Being almost totally self-reliant is very difficult, so it will be a relief for her to go to the other extreme occasionally. But given Hare's views on individuality, it is natural that he should condemn this partial liberation of the sexual instincts as "the token of declining autonomy and comprehension."[19] There is no difference in kind between Caroline's attempts at escape and the swinishness of the journalists or the Bagleys.

Sexual activity does not work for Caroline any more than it did for Maggie, however. This is because she knows why she enjoys sex. The existence of conflicting ideologies within society poses dilemmas which encourage her to think critically about her attitudes to love and sex. One-dimensionality is by definition an unselfconscious state, so the fact that she can recognise her activity as a form of escape, and actively seek it for that purpose, proves that she is not completely in the grip of the advertisers and the movie producers. This explains why the escape it provides is only temporary. Instead of exhibiting a general and constant decline in individuality, Caroline's loss of consciousness is only sporadic; the rest of the time she is quite aware of the injustice of society. Therefore, she is far from being an example of Marcuse's one-dimensional person or Fromm's automaton.

In fact, William provides a better example of repressive desublimation in action than Caroline. Despite his strong romantic tendencies, he is much more conformist in all respects than she is. Unlike her, he does not want to escape from consciousness of who he is, but to be reassured that the persona he has adopted is socially acceptable:

> I had a series of rather grim girlfriends, some of them, well, not particularly nice. . . . I suppose the truth is I badly needed flattery . . . . Anyone who wanted me, I'd take them in. (37)

Since he is less reflective than Caroline, he is of course not aware of this: it is only in retrospect that he gains a glimmer of self-knowledge. He wants to be told that he is better than everyone else, but what this actually means is that he is the *same* as everyone else, that he has successfully achieved the ideals of manhood represented by all those interchangeable Hollywood heroes. He manages to hide from his vague

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18. *The Fear of Freedom*, p. 160.
19. Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 76.

sense that he is not as good as he should be by proving that he is at least no worse than anyone else.

His comment on his marriage at the end of the play is also interesting, because it is an attempt to reconcile two opposing ideological impulses:

> We've always tried to keep an open marriage. I mean I think a marriage is refreshed by affairs. I wouldn't necessarily recommend it to everyone, but if you can do it . . . and not go too far. (40)

There is a conflict between the exclusivity of romanticism and the all-embracing nature of modern sexuality. This poses a dilemma for people like William, who have been brought up to believe in both. Reimut Reiche offers a solution, in a section revealingly entitled, "Promiscuity as the Completion of Marriage":

> One of the most modern ways of adapting sexually to marriage being propagated at present is to indulge in extra-marital affairs with the blessing of one's marriage partner, or at least, not with any open protest on his or her part.[20]

This enables both partners to satisfy the appetite for variety which has been bred into them by the consumer society, while retaining the feeling of security which marriage is supposed to provide. Presumably, it works for some couples, but William's final statement, "our lives dismay us," suggests that, for him at least, it does not. He is subconsciously aware of the tension which still exists, so although he may not know why he has "dreams of leaving," he is far from content.

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[20]. *Sexuality and Class Struggle*, p. 102.

## Chapter 8
## All the lonely people: *Wetherby*

*Wetherby*, Hare's first feature film, is possibly his best work so far. It sums up most of what has been said in the previous history plays, and extends his critique both chronologically and thematically. Like *Knuckle*, *Wetherby* is about the ideological shift which Hare believes took place around the early 1970s, the effects of which had become even more extreme by 1985. Like *Licking Hitler* and *Plenty*, it is about nostalgia. And like *Teeth 'n' Smiles* and *Dreams of Leaving*, it is about love and sex.

On the face of it, however, *Wetherby* is just another example of the popular British tradition of plays about the mid-life crises of the middle class. Everything is always going wrong, and life always seems to be an uphill struggle. There is a long line of stand-up comedians, such as Les Dawson, who have specialised in this kind of lugubrious humour, but it has been television where the tradition has been strongest. Many of the better television comedies of the last ten years have dealt with people's sense of the emptiness of their lives: *Solo*, *Butterflies*, *Shelley*, *Agony*, *It Takes a Worried Man*, *Life Without George*, *The Two of Us*. On the conventional stage, too, it is a frequent theme. There are elements of it in all of Alan Ayckbourn's work, as well as in the plays of Simon Gray, Michael Frayn, Peter Nichols, Tom Stoppard and Christopher Hampton. Although comedy dominates this tradition, there is a smaller, but still significant, body of work which treats the desolation of modern society seriously. This form is typified by Alan Bennett's small-scale tragedies about fear, loneliness and despair. *Wetherby* clearly belongs with these.

Most of these plays share an uncritical acceptance of the concept which they present. They assume that to be unhappy is part of the human condition, Life with a capital L. The majority of them are fatalistic, and simply provide ways of temporarily alleviating the problem rather than of solving it. Even the most life-affirming playwrights of this tradition are still largely passive. They may preach the power of positive thought, for example, as a means of overcoming the worst tortures of self-doubt, but they never ask why these tortures exist. Willy Russell's *Shirley Valentine* seems to advocate "living your dreams" as the key to happiness. In different ways, *The Fall and Rise of Reginald Perrin* and Chris Bernard's film *Letter to Brezhnev* are equally artificial.

*Wetherby* differs from these plays, not in its subject matter, which is still the isolation and unhappiness prevalent in contemporary Western society, but in its critical approach. Hare does not accept that this state of affairs is unavoidable, and argues that

it is a *social* phenomenon. In this film, he examines the social causes of the problem, and implies that radical social change would remove a good deal of the anxiety and frustration. He criticises the unquestioning pessimism of the popular existentialists who dominate the modern theatre, and examines the social causes of their *Angst.*

## I

*Wetherby* is full of statements of hopelessness and disillusionment. All of the main characters are in the throes of a crisis of some sort, either temporary or on-going. Since Jean is the main character, however, we see more of the reasons for her troubles than of anyone else's. The gist of her situation is indicated when Stanley tells her, "if you're frightened of loneliness, never get married," and she replies, "I'm not frightened. I'm hardened by now."[1] Being hardened to loneliness means repressing awareness of it. Morgan overstates the case when he growls at her, "you fake all that cheerfulness"(87); successful repression allows her to find considerable satisfaction in her job and her friends. But he does have a point. Marcuse writes that in contemporary society "the happy consciousness is shaky enough — a thin surface over fear, frustration, and disgust."[2] Hare shows this happy consciousness, which in a strong woman like Jean we would expect to be more stable than in most, being shattered to reveal the desolation underneath. She may only recognise her loneliness in times of stress, but it is always there.

On the face of it, she — like all the characters in *Wetherby* — is unhappy because she has caught a glimpse of the void, the essential meaninglessness of life. But what appears to be a metaphysical vacuum is really an ideological trap. The evidence for this lies in the answer to one of the many mysteries in the play: why does Jean fall into John Morgan's arms at her dinner party? There is an element of desperation in this act, which is out of keeping with what we have seen of her character.

The catalyst for this event, and indirectly for everything that follows, is her conversation with Suzie Bannerman that afternoon. Suzie wonders whether there is any point in continuing her schooling, since, "you get a university degree, like in French, then what? Maybe you get to be a secretary. And that's if you're lucky"(16). Suzie is supported in her view that the sole purpose of education is to get a job by the parents who accost Jean at the reception after the school play:

> I won't want Janice to do A level English. Physics, that's the thing.

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1. David Hare, *Wetherby* (London: Faber and Faber, 1985), p. 36. All further references to this work appear in the text. It is worth noting that there are several differences between the published screenplay and the film itself. Since the film is not readily available for analysis, I shall limit myself to comments on the published text.
2. *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 76.

> We want her to get on. We bought her a home computer. We don't let her buy games. No *Star Wars*, nothing like that. ICI needs physicists, doesn't it? (62)

Clearly, though, Jean has entered the teaching profession for nobler motives than merely training people for the work-force:

> JEAN: That's not what education is, though, Suzie. If you're always thinking, I must *use* my education for a career, then you're already thinking about education in the wrong way. Education is a thing in itself, a way of fulfilling your potential, of looking for ways of thinking, ways, which if you're lucky, will help you not just in your career, but in your whole life.
>
> SUZIE: What ways?
>
> JEAN: Well, ways of being ordered, I suppose. Having some discipline in the way you think. Not always being bull-headed, learning not to rush into things. (16)

This is a familiar justification of the value of education. She regards her task as more important than simply churning out a generation of unemployed secretaries.

Under Suzie's persistent questioning, however, she has no adequate response to the accusation that her view of education is élitist:

> SUZIE: Do you think uneducated people do that [rush into things]?
>
> JEAN: Well, I don't. No, not necessarily. I mean, sometimes.
>
> SUZIE: Are they inferior for not knowing how to think?
>
> JEAN: No, of course not.
>
> SUZIE: But if you have something . . . what you call a way of thinking, which they don't, surely you're saying you're superior?
>
> JEAN: No, Suzie, of course I wouldn't say that.
>
> SUZIE: What then?
>
> JEAN: Different.
>
> SUZIE: Better or worse? (16-17)

Suzie's arguments are misleading, because they make her teacher's position appear worse than it is. Jean's liberal ideology means that she believes that all humans are intrinsically valuable, and intrinsically of *equal* value: those who have learned these "ways of thinking" are simply *luckier* than most, since they will be better able to cope with the world around them. In this respect liberalism is entirely compatible with Western Marxism, which also places a very high value on education.

The flaw in Jean's theory is that it has very little to do with the reality. Louis Althusser writes that the education system, performs two functions:

> . . . the reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but also, at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order, i. e. a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression.[3]

Obviously, schools teach what he calls "know-how," but "besides these techniques and knowledges, and in learning them, children at school also learn the 'rules' of good behaviour, i. e. the attitude that should be observed by every agent in the division of labour, according to the job he is 'destined' for."[4] Pupils are not trained for original and critical thought, but to produce what will be useful to society. They may incidentally acquire some skills which will help them in other aspects of their lives, but this is not the main focus of the education system, regardless of the opinions of committed teachers like Jean.

Suzie's emphasis on the practical side of education, the job training, is therefore a more accurate depiction of what education has become in Western society than the humanist ideal of education-for-life. She makes Jean realise just how great the gulf has become between what she believes she should be doing and what she is actually doing. In a technocratic society, educated people *are* superior, in that they earn more money and are granted more respect. When jobs are relatively few and far between, and almost certain to go to those with money and power behind them, her kind of education is a luxury that most pupils (from the middle class as well as the working class) cannot afford. As Suzie implies, they would be better off collecting the dole.

This debate undermines Jean's faith in herself and in what she does. This crisis is not, however, a *spiritual* one. Jean deceives herself and us when she claims that Morgan came to her because "the lonely recognize the lonely"(35). She has re-interpreted her unhappiness as part of the human condition, in accordance with the modernist tradition of the isolated individual. Although she was alone before Suzie talked to her, she was not usually lonely. She is closer to the truth when she describes herself as having "a feeling for solitude"(36). This also implies isolation, but in a positive sense, as a state she enjoys. Jean was fulfilled in her job and happy with her friends; her isolation was not a problem until Suzie pointed out the contradiction between her view of the world and the current state of society. While isolation on

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3. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," pp. 127-28.
4. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," p. 127.

some abstract metaphysical or epistemological level may be an inevitable part of the human condition, as Walter Pater claimed in *The Renaissance*, this is only a problem in an alienated society. It is important to distinguish between isolation, which is a *human* fact, and loneliness, which is a *social* problem.

The trouble is caused by the ideological shift which has been a feature of several of Hare's plays. Suzie's doubts are prompted not by some philosophical musings on educational theory, but by the unlikelihood of finding a job. The attitudes which Jean and her contemporaries had bred into them during the 1950s are no longer appropriate. It may be that they were never more than a smoke-screen for the continuing inequality of society, since they glossed over the fact that the rich still had easier access to education than the poor, but during that decade of hope and prosperity it was probably an effective one. It is the changing economic situation which makes the inconsistencies of their beliefs more obvious.

If Jean's *Angst* is social in origin, it is reasonable to assume that the same is true of that of the others. The character who is closest to the British tradition of comic failures is Stanley Pilborough. Like Frank in *Educating Rita* he is witty, drinks a lot and is obviously disappointed with his life. He is alienated at home at well as at work because Marcia, although she is very well-intentioned, is too ham-fisted to provide much emotional support. His profession has given him a jaundiced view of human nature:

> You wouldn't know, I'm the local solicitor, the town's official sanctifier of greed. Those little unseemly transactions. I see people as they truly are. . . .
> I remember once my father, also a solicitor, said to me, 'I have learnt never to judge any man by his behaviour with money or the opposite sex.' Yet it is my own saddened experience, that those are the *only* ways to judge them. (79)

He is unable to ignore the venality of the system of which he is a part. The increasing ruthlessness of the business world which Hare examined in *Brassneck* is presumably behind this. Like Patrick Delafield, he can no longer regard the making of money as morally neutral.

Mike Langdon also loses any idealism he may once have had. In this decade it would be very difficult to preserve the image of the friendly bobby on the beat, keeping the nation on the straight and narrow. The popular conception of the police as impartial upholders of justice has largely disappeared: corruption and prejudice are widely suspected, and the miners' strikes of 1981 revealed the constabulary's function as a repressive branch of government more clearly than any other event since the war. Although none of these are mentioned in the play, and we are never told what Mike's

motives for joining the police force were, it seems likely that this is the root of his problem.

Like Jean, Mike has managed to suppress recognition of the increasing brutality of the institution to which he belongs, using artificial means. His relationship with Chrissie makes his work bearable, because he can feel that his real life is happening at home, and that the unpleasantness of being a cop in Britain in the 1980s is somehow only peripheral. When she goes back to her husband, this unpleasantness overwhelms him, and he recognises the justice of Jean's epigram, "the police who always bring sadness"(74):

> It's shaken my whole idea of myself. What I'm doing as a policeman. If the day was no good, if it was awful or silly, I could always go back to Chrissie and laugh. But now it turns out, she wasn't really with me. She laughed. But she was elsewhere. (72)

Like Stanley, he seems to have a poor opinion of the human race. This poor opinion extends even to Jean. While everyone else (except Roger Braithwaite) assumes that Jean is "a good woman chosen for some reason as the victim of the ultimate practical joke"(47), he suspects that she somehow goaded Morgan into committing suicide. This explains the way he meddles in her life by sending Karen to visit her.

The older characters in *Wetherby* are all suffering from a sort of spiritual entropy, because they feel that the old certainties are drifting away. According to Pink Floyd, "hanging on in quiet desperation is the English way," but this is only one of a wide range of attempted solutions to these identity crises which are found in the play.[5] A few of the other escapes which Hare shows are alcoholism, violence, emotional withdrawal, nostalgia, romantic love and sex. These are not mutually exclusive, and many of the characters adopt several at once. Some of them are familiar from the earlier plays. Stanley's method, like Archie Maclean's and William Cofax's fellow journalists', is "the drinking of whisky . . . the drinking of gin . . ."(88) He does not drink to forget, because his severest criticisms of society are made at Jean's dinner party, when he is definitely inebriated:

> Drunk? Yes. Drunk and disorderly. Where once I was orderly. My thoughts were once in neat rows. Like vegetables. Pegged out, under cloches. I kept my thoughts under cloches. But now they grow wild. (79)

Alcohol seems to allow him to admit to thoughts and feelings which are normally suppressed, while at the same time deadening his consciousness so that they are less frightening than they would be when he is sober.

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5. "Time," *The Dark Side of the Moon*, Harvest, Q4 SHVLA. 804, 1973.

The atrophying of the critical faculty, which was one of the main themes of *Dreams of Leaving*, is common in this play as well. Marcia's good works keep any unwelcome flashes of self-knowledge at bay by ensuring that she is too busy to indulge in serious thought, as Stanley implies:

> Oh, she's tremendous. Yes. The Charity Bridge Tournament takes all her time. (91)

Roger Braithwaite has his fascination with murder, quite apart from his affair with his "colleague from Home Economics"(59). This unreflective behaviour allows them to continue to believe what they have always believed, because they simply ignore anything which might contradict it. Again, however, to give up all sensitivity seems too great a cost for a little peace of mind.

A particularly interesting variant of this abdication of the critical faculty is shown by Roger and Verity Braithwaite, the unpleasant couple who bicker their way through Jean's party. His "rationality" is a perfect illustration of what Marcuse describes as the "totalitarian logic of accomplished facts":[6]

> Yes, you know, *logic*, that holds society together. *Logic*, that says people mustn't be allowed to go round killing each other . . . .
> Logic also tells you that there must be constraints, and that if everyone went round saying what they truly feel, the result would be barbarism. And I prefer civilization. That's all. (48-49)

Roger's intellectual effort is entirely directed towards the justification of the *status quo*. Marcuse provides a perfect analysis of his form of ideology:

> The social position of the individual and his relation to others appear not only to be determined by objective qualities and laws, but these qualities and laws seem to lose their mysterious and uncontrollable character; they appear as calculable manifestations of (scientific) rationality. The world tends to become the stuff of total administration, which absorbs even the administrators. The web of domination has become the web of Reason itself, and this society is fatally entangled in it. And the transcending modes of thought seem to transcend Reason itself.[7]

Roger, like Darwin and Brock, suffers from that dreadful English repression which excludes all spontaneity and fun. Verity says, "he won't allow a firework display on the common for fear a rocket lands on our thatched roof"(50). Yet he has been tricked into defending the very system which keeps him repressed.

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6. *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 14.
7. *One-Dimensional Man*, p. 169.

Verity rejects his spurious theorising, saying, "life is *dangerous*. Don't you realize? And sometimes there's nothing you can do"(50). She is right to recognise the limits of what for Roger passes as thought, but in doing so she rejects all theory, and relies instead on what is generally called "common sense":

> I think if they [blacks] want to be part of things, if they want to be accepted as British, then they have to put up with the fact that they will be a butt of people's humour. Just like mothers-in-law. . . . And if you actually *don't* make jokes about Blacks it's a kind of reverse discrimination. It's a way of saying they don't really belong. (47-48)

Verity's implicit racism is revealed by the fact that she never considers *why* blacks should be the butt of people's humour. Gramsci writes of common sense that "its most fundamental characteristic is that it is a conception which, even in the brain of one individual, is fragmentary, incoherent and inconsequential, in conformity with the social and cultural position of those masses whose philosophy it is."[8] In Verity's case, it is simply a euphemism for stupidity of an especially revolting kind.

While the older characters grew up in a time when optimism was easy, mere survival is often hard enough for today's young people, and many of them have lowered their sights accordingly. Hare's reference to "a generation who are cowed" applies even better to the eighties than it did to the seventies.[9] Marcia perceives something of this when she complains about the decline of the adventurous spirit:

> I look at the young — truly — and I am mystified. Want nothing. Need nothing. Have no ambitions. Get married, have children, get a mortgage. A hundred thousand years of human evolution, brontosaurus, tyrannosaurus, man. And the sum ambition? Two-up two-down in the West Riding of Yorkshire, on a custom-built estate of brick and glass. (12)

In a sense, *Wetherby* is an updated version of *Knuckle*. In both plays there is a generation gap, with Patrick and the older Wetherby characters on one side and Curly, Sarah, Jenny Wilbur and John Morgan on the other. Jean and her friends face the same dilemma as Patrick; do they persist with their old ideals in the face of an increasingly antagonistic society, or do they try to adapt? Morgan, on the other hand, must work out how to respond to a world which has fewer certainties than that in which his parents lived. The youngest characters face a *new* problem. They are not searching for or trying to hold on to an outdated ideology — in fact, their problem is not essentially ideological at all. Their rejection of traditional values, whether it takes

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8. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p. 419.
9. "Lecture," p. 70.

the form of despair (Karen) or a craving for excitement (Suzie), is an entirely appropriate response to the climate of fear that Thatcher has created.[10]

So the younger characters feel just as hopeless as their elders, but for different reasons. Sometimes this is expressed in pragmatic terms, such as Suzie Bannerman's, "whatever you do, you seem to end up unemployed"(16). For Karen Creasy, it manifests itself as total passivity:

> You make an effort, you try to be nice, try to do anything . . . you just get your head chopped off. Why *try*? (66)

John Morgan's view of the world is even more misanthropic, bordering on nihilism. He cannot believe that Jean can find anything to be glad about:

> Please don't argue with me. All that hope coming out of you. All that cheerful resolution. All that wonderful enlightenment. For what? For nothing. You know it's for nothing. Don't tell me that cheerfulness is real. (87)

These statements are more extreme than those of Jean's generation, which suggests that the dissatisfaction is much nearer the surface for these younger people.

One form of escape adopted by the youth, which was not evident among the middle-aged, is withdrawal from reality into a psychic sphere where they feel safe.[11] Since hope seems to lead inevitably to disappointment, it is easier to be totally apathetic. This leads to a voluntary loss of individuality of the kind which we saw in the previous play. Here is Marcia's comment on a young colleague:

> There's a new girl at work, at the library, the sort of girl men fall for, vacant . . . .
>
> Distant, that's right. She doesn't really have a personality, she just has a way of suggesting to men that she'll be whatever they want her to be. Not a *person*, not a real person . . . (12)

Karen is the best example of this. Jean tells Mike that there is no depth to her personality:

> I just can't get hold of her. She arrived on my doorstep and I thought, oh, she really wants to talk to me. Because she's had a similar experience, I suppose. But it's as if she's missing a faculty.

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[10]. This division into two generations is of course to some extent an artificial one. It is probably best to think of the characters in terms of a continuum from oldest to youngest. We cannot, however, oversimplify by placing idealism at the upper end of the scale and cynicism and apathy at the lower end, because this would not account for Suzie Bannerman, who has a positive outlook on love and life, if not on education.

[11]. This does not mean, however, that older people do not also adopt this stratagem. In fact, Marcia's charities and Roger's mysteries are in many ways very similar.

> She seems to say something. Then it just slips away. She has no curiosity. (55)[12]

She deliberately avoids conversation, not because she is incapable of the strong feelings which it can give rise to, but because she finds them painful. Jean tries to draw her out of her shell, but without success:

> JEAN: Karen, I feel there's a lot you'd like to tell me.
>
> KAREN: Not specially.
>
> JEAN: And sometimes you can't get it out.
>
> (*There is a silence.* KAREN *says nothing.* JEAN *moves back, speaking very quietly, defeated.*)
>
> Yes. If you like I'll watch television with you. (52)

When Mr Varley tries to talk to her at the reception after the school play, she is completely unable to cope. She breaks her glass, cutting her hand in the process, and begins to cry. His manner is avuncular rather than sinister, but she feels threatened by almost any kind of human contact:

> It's just that I hate it. All this asking that goes on. People digging about. The way people have to dig in each other. It's horrible. (64)

Her attitude involves a sort of catatonia, a form of emotional sterility in which people exist without really living.

It is interesting that when Mr Varley approaches her, Karen "*looks desperately across to where* JEAN *is seen to be in conversation with a couple of* PARENTS"(62). Her reliance on Jean is the most extreme example of this withdrawal, as it is a sort of infantile regression in which she looks for a mother or father figure who will protect her. This is why she asks to stay with Jean, even though she admits that it was Mike's idea that she should visit her in the first place:

> KAREN *has a big plate of sausages and beans and toast in front of her. She is shovelling it in happily.* JEAN *is sitting opposite, watching. Like a mother and child.* (45)

Hare extracts some pleasant visual irony from this relationship, when Mike drives Jean home after they meet in Leeds:

> KAREN*'s face asleep in bed. Light falls across her face as* JEAN *and* LANGDON *open the door. They stand together on the landing, looking in.* (55)[13]

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12. Soon after this, Chrissie leaves the table abruptly, as if she finds the topic uncomfortable. Later there is a shot of her waiting in the car while John and Jean look in on Chrissie, "*a curious effect like an illuminated skull*"(56). This may establish a resemblance between Karen and Chrissie.

13. Hare makes a point of following an earlier scene in which Jean looks at Karen while she is asleep (50) with a flashback of Jim in Jean's bed, shot from exactly the same angle (52). The connection may be simply that Karen acts as a reminder of Morgan, and hence of Jim, or it may illustrate the semi-maternal role which Jean has played in all her relationships.

This is a brief tableau of the satisfied nuclear family, with the loving parents checking on their child, except that they are not her parents and Jean wants to be rid of her.

Jean suggests that this policy of non-involvement is unlikely to succeed in any case, because it "doesn't matter how well locked up you are, at times you're always going to have to let people in"(27). This seems probable enough, but Karen, with her plea, "why can't people leave me *alone*?"(63), may be proof that it is possible to live, after a fashion, without ever facing any unwelcome intrusions.

There is a great difference between what the two generations want out of life. This is made clearer by examining one of the major images of the film, that of watching. There are many shots of one person watching someone else. Morgan watches Marcia in a distorting mirror as she leaves her work (58), and then watches her and Jean at the jumble sale (59-60). He is looking for comfort of some kind. So is Mike Langdon. Twice we see him standing outside Jean's house, looking in. Being on the outside is a strong image of alienation, especially when the interior is well lit and inviting.

But watching does not always indicate a desire for acceptance. The only time Karen is "*perfectly content*"(46) in the whole play is when she is watching a comedy programme on television. She sits in the school hall watching Jean put up the lights for the play. Her viewing is completely detached; she has no wish to participate. This also reveals alienation of a kind, because it means that Karen is in the world but does not feel that she is a part of it. While she probably does not actually enjoy her isolation, she at least accepts it as preferable to the alternatives.

## II

Another common response to the state of modern society is to mourn the passing of a golden age. This is worth considering on its own, because it is the solution adopted by John Morgan, who holds an intermediary position between the two main generations in the play. Since this backward-looking stance is the natural province of the older characters, it is not surprising that it is most clearly expressed by Stanley:

> I *expect* good of nobody. And am sometimes pleasantly surprised. And when I find good . . . my first feeling is one of nostalgia. For something we've lost. (79)

This golden age, of course, is the decade in which he grew up. Hare has returned to the territory he covered in *Licking Hitler* and *Plenty*, both of which are attacks on the myth of the "Age of Affluence" which provides an easy solution for people who are dissatisfied with the current state of society. This is often linked with a theory of

moral decay, in which the nihilism of the young is seen as a decline for which they, and not the system, are to blame.

Morgan also laments the disappearance of the moral certainty which belonged to an earlier era. In his case, of course, it is an era which he imagines rather than one he experienced:

> I only know goodness and anger and revenge and evil and desire . . . these seem to me far better words than neurosis and psychology and paranoia. These old words . . . these good old words have a sort of conviction which all this modern apparatus of language now lacks. (79)

He has persuaded himself that the cause of all society's problems is the rejection of innate values:

> We bury these words, these simple feelings, we bury them deep. And all the building over that constitutes this century will not wish these feelings away. (81)

When Roger challenges him to define his terms, he replies, "they don't need defining. If you can't feel them you might as well be dead"(81).

Morgan's position in between the other generations (six years older than Karen, fifteen years younger than Mike) explains why he has none of the faith of his elders but is so desperate to find it. It is interesting that people who knew him described him as having "a central disfiguring blankness"(28). This suggests that he is really like Karen, but does not want to be, an invisible person looking for some clothes. His solution is to adopt a new ideal to replace those that are lost. This is a social form of infantile regression. Like Karen, who latches on to Jean as a kind of comfort-blanket, John finds in her a spiritual parent-figure. When Jean rejects him he shoots himself, since his only defence against what he perceives as the meaninglessness of life without the absolutes of an outdated ideology has failed.

The flashbacks, however, show that the 1950s, which represent the ideals of decency and security for several of the characters, were not so idyllic after all. This is important because otherwise it would be possible to regard the play as purely nostalgic. When Jean was growing up, Britain was still fighting imperialist wars overseas, in Korea, Malaya and, later, Suez. Jim's slighting reference to Malaya as "half a war"(23) shows the same lack of concern for the indigenous people that Lazar showed in *Plenty*. So does Arthur's exaggerated pidgin request to join the poker game in Singapore:

> Take part in your game. We would like to. We have heard. The best game of poker in Malaya. (83)

The war seems so unrealistic that it had not even occurred to Jean that Jim might be killed. With such a false vision of the world, she is clearly incapable of perceiving the evils of imperialism, but the audience is expected to recognise them.

Even in Britain the position was not as rosy as people like to believe. Jean and Marcia used to fantasise about escaping from the constraints of provincial England:

> YOUNG JEAN: And London, tell me, what would that be like?
>
> YOUNG MARCIA: London? Oh, wonderful, London would be wonderful. Just totally different. Not like Wetherby in any way . . . .
>
> It's so exciting, the idea of living in a great city. People say, oh, cities are so anonymous. But that's what's so good about them. Nobody knows who you are. (29)

This desire to get away explains the peculiar dream sequence which appears late in the film:

> *Process shot: the* YOUNG JEAN, *naked, runs down a corridor at full pelt. The walls are on either side of her but as she runs they recede. Her figure stays the same size in proportion to the walls, which go endlessly by. She strains, to no effect.* (86)

Life is represented as a nightmare, in which people feel that they can never break down the walls of the prison surrounding them. Jean and Marcia use the excitement of sex to alleviate this sense of being trapped. Jim's eagerness to fight in Malaya is yet another example of this wish to break out.

The flashbacks establish, moreover, that there was still a huge gulf between the classes, and that women especially were restricted by social attitudes. Even if the alleged political and economic equality of the 1950s had been achieved it would probably not have made much difference, since prejudices which have been maturing for decades cannot wither away overnight. Mr Mortimer's chauvinist objections to Jean's plans to attend university while Jim is overseas show the gap that still exists between her own middle-class upbringing and Jim's working-class background:

> MR MORTIMER: I don't think a woman who's going to get married should be thinking of going off away from her home.
>
> YOUNG JEAN: But Jim won't be there. He'll be in Malaya.
>
> MR MORTIMER: Ay, but he'd want to know that you're where you belong. (37)

This typifies the narrow-mindedness of so many of Hare's working-class characters. It is also, of course, another example of Gramsci's "common sense."

Even Jim, a member of a younger and possibly more enlightened working class generation, is not immune to this failing, as Jean complains:

> If you want the truth it's this: with him I can't talk. With him I can't say anything I feel. Because . . . because I read books I feel for some reason I'm not allowed to talk. For that reason, there is always a gulf. (69)

This is not entirely his fault, since they have simply had different experiences. This difference is brought home graphically by the end of their first tiff:

> JIM: Last bus.
>
> YOUNG JEAN: Already?
>
> JIM: You know nothing. This is a pig of a town. (39)

These episodes, showing that class prejudice still functioned and that women were still oppressed even in the more liberal fifties, should undermine any simple feeling of nostalgia. The past which Stanley and John invoke is largely imaginary.

## III

Most of the characters in the play, of whatever generation, are looking for stability in their lives. One of the most common ways of achieving this is through romantic love. Both Jean and Mike, for example, having felt their credo being undermined, seek human contact as a means of re-establishing their sense of certainty. Hare examines a wide range of relationships in this play: John and Jean; John and Karen; Jean and Mike; Mike and Chrissie; young Jean and Jim; Stanley and Marcia; Suzie and Alfred Egerton from Science Fifth. To some extent, he is simply restating his earlier criticisms of romanticism, in particular of its unrealistic nature. But he also expands on his earlier analyses of the destructive side of the Mills and Boon myth, linking it more explicitly with physical violence and with guilt.

In Jean's case, sex seems to fulfil much the same function as it does for Maggie and Caroline. The description of her passionate embrace with Mike makes it clear that physical love can act as a kind of release:

> *They embrace. Then he begins to kiss her, softly, kindly, all over her face. She kisses him. They rub their faces together, all the tension going out of them. They kiss again, their faces going down together side by side. All the memories go, as they embrace, their hands all over each other.* (89)

It is probably irrelevant whether they slept together or not, but she is obviously very happy after their brief encounter. This address to her class near the end of the play shows that she is eager to pick up her life where it had left off three weeks before:

> Right then, for those of us still remaining — us maniacs, assorted oddballs, eccentrics, folk who still feel that school is worthwhile, I suggest we keep trying. All right, everyone?

(*She looks round smiling. They are pleased by this speech.*)

Good. Then let's work. (90-91)

The question is whether this rekindled confidence is based on an illusion. It seems that her encounter with Mike has persuaded her that the old feelings still exist, and that they still prove the inherent decency of human beings. It is this assumption of decency which underlies Jean's liberal principles, and so her faith has been restored.

Unfortunately, she is deluding herself. She actually has two problems; Suzie's questioning of her principles, and Morgan's suicide. Mike solves one but not the other. She got involved with Morgan out of a need for comfort, but got a nightmare instead, so her initial problem is compounded by his death. If that is what attempts to get close to people lead to, then perhaps contact is not desirable or even possible. This is Jean's interpretation of her trouble, when Mike finally puts her on the spot:

LANGDON: What happened? Was it your fault?

(*She looks at him nervously, trapped at last. Then she goes and sits on the sofa. Her shoulders sag, as if the whole effort of the last weeks were over.*)

JEAN: I think, in a way, it's because he was a stranger. I'm not sure I can explain. Because I didn't know him, now I feel him dragging me down. I thought I could get over it. But everywhere now . . . the darkness beckons. These things become real. He wants me down there. (73)

The darkness seems to be Morgan's spiritual emptiness, which he assumed that she shared. But this belief in the futility of human existence contradicts one of her most basic tenets, and constitutes a crisis far graver than that engendered by Suzie.

Mike provides an antidote to John Morgan's psychotic nihilism, because he reaffirms both the possibility and the value of genuine human contact. But she has still not resolved the contradiction in her beliefs about education which Suzie pointed out. This was, after all, her original crisis, and no amount of warm and fuzzy feelings will enable her to justify her teaching practices in a society in which education is often unproductive. It is as if she has completed a subconscious syllogism: her belief in the goodness of human nature allows her to believe in the value of education, Mike has confirmed her belief in the goodness of human nature, therefore she can continue to believe in the value of education. She does not consider if the first premise is valid; what is it about human nature which entails that education is of universal value? There may well be answers to this question, but Jean does not look for them. Although love makes her feel better, it is a placebo rather than a cure.

Even Morgan's suicide, although it has a serious effect on her, becomes less important when she can dismiss him as "mad." In this she bears a surprising

resemblance to William in *Dreams of Leaving*, who was grateful when Caroline went "crazy." Jean decides, rightly, that she was not to blame for Morgan's death, but does not look for the real (that is, social) causes. If she had, she would have found that her faith in the fundamental decency of democratic capitalism and of those who run it (the faith that also underlies her belief in the value of education) was rather naïve. Liberalism, despite the genuine good will of its adherents, is so lacking in analysis that it usually concentrates on the symptoms rather than the disease itself, just as Jean has done, so it merely ends up perpetuating the problem.

At the end of the play, Mike offers further evidence that love is not a panacea for everything from existential *Angst* to scurvy. When he was with Chrissie he thought everything was rosy, and he turns to Jean in an attempt to regain his faith in himself and his work. But while Jean returns to work confident and happy, his situation is very ambiguous:

> *Langdon's room.* LANGDON *is standing on one side of the room in his shirtsleeves, tie and suit trousers. His jacket lies across the unmade bed on the other side of the room. He is looking across at it. Then he moves across the room. His wallet and keys are lying on the dressing table. He opens the wallet. Inside, his CID card. He takes it out, looks at it, then tears it up into little pieces. They sprinkle down on the floor.* (91)

This shot makes it clear that Mike is still far from happy, and that this second attempt at re-establishing his equilibrium has been a failure.

The reason for this is obvious. However pleasant love may be, the euphoria will do nothing to change the rest of the world. Mike's job is still just as dispiriting as ever. Love may provide a temporary refuge from the unpleasantness of reality, but eventually one must return to the outside. If the desire for love only functions as a desire for sanctuary from a troublesome external life, then its success is likely to be limited. Love will not make the original problem go away, and eventually it will have to be faced. For Jean, too, there is no guarantee that there will not be another Suzie who will ask her the same awkward questions.

Mike and Jean's "love" differs from the earlier forms of escape only by degrees of effectiveness. Romantic love is not the answer to the world's problems, or to personal problems either, because it has nothing to to with the real world. Its unrealistic nature is shown most clearly by Young Jean and Jim. The young lovers in the fifties are blissfully happy a lot of the time. Their love looks good, but as Jean suspects it is only good when they keep it away from the real world — as soon as that intrudes they move apart:

YOUNG JEAN: Perhaps it is silly. Impractical. We've never really met, you and me. We're always so happy together. It never occurs to us that there's a world of people out there. We can't spend our life . . .

JIM: What?

YOUNG JEAN: Just . . . with the sheets up over our heads. (39)

They argue after going to see Jim's parents, and she is evasive when he goes to Malaya. Her lament that she can never tell him what she really feels is shown by their extremely stilted farewell at the airport:

JIM: Are you being true with me?

YOUNG JEAN: True? What does it mean?

(JIM *waits, serious.*)

JIM: If you've anything to say, speak it now.

*(There are tears in her eyes. She shakes her head.)*

YOUNG JEAN: Nothing. (77)

So love never was the whole answer. And now it is harder to shut out the real world because it is less pleasant and therefore more intrusive. Suzie Bannerman and Alfred Egerton show the same unrealistic behaviour. Running away to London (as Young Marcia also dreamed of doing) is just a more dramatic form of escape than making love in an aircraft. For Suzie, love and sex provide the excitement which is missing in the rest of her life.

Not all the reactions to the apparent hopelessness of life in contemporary Britain are as peaceable as Karen's catatonia, Stanley's nostalgia or Jean's romanticism. It makes just as much sense, for the young at least, to attack the system which seems to have let them down. There is an element of this undirected aggression in Morgan. When he first arrives in Wetherby and takes a room, he stands at the window with his gun looking down at the people in the market, "*the sniper thinking about possible targets*"(34). Here we have another form of watching, which is neither passive nor wistful. Morgan wants to take revenge on society for excluding him from the happiness which he believes is possible. An interesting side-issue is the relation between Morgan's violence and Stanley's joke about Mrs Thatcher:

The Prime Minister. Taking some terrible revenge. For something. Some deep damage. Something inside. God knows what. For crimes behind the privet hedge. And now the whole country is suffering. And yet we've done nothing to her. (78-79)

In a sense, all the characters of Thatcher's generation are suffering from "crimes behind the privet hedge," since it is hidden evils of ideology that have the biggest effect on their lives. Not everyone, of course, has the egotism to take it out on millions of

fellow-sufferers. But at least she has brought the suffering out into the open; the British youth are not going to worry about ideological contradictions when they cannot find a job to support themselves.

One of the most interesting aspects of *Wetherby* is the way in which these violent impulses are linked to "love." They should be totally opposed, but Hare uses John Morgan to show that there is a misogynist element to romantic love which undermines the idea of love as a healer. Morgan believes that love will give his life a meaning which it has never had. Marcia is closer to the truth than we would expect when she says to Jean, "perhaps you looked like his mother, now that is possible"(36). The strongest evidence that John *is* after a mother-figure is his pursuit of Marcia, a kind, maternal woman.

Despite his protestations that he only wants friendship, however, Morgan's approach is dangerous and aggressive. He shouts at Karen, "I want some feeling! I want some contact!"(65), and then stalks both Marcia and Jean like a hunter. When he breaks into Karen's room, the result is frighteningly close to rape (like William Cofax, he does not seem to understand that love and sex are not identical). And, although Jean is willingly on the floor with him upstairs at her dinner party, he twists her head and she has to fight to free herself. These acts of violence are partly caused by his misanthropy, the hatred of everybody which is the objectification of his own inner conflict. They are also motivated, at least in part, by the misogyny which is implicit in his romantic conception of women.

The contradictory impulses in Morgan's character, the desire for affection and the desire to destroy, are most evident when he goes upstairs with Jean, ostensibly to fix her roof. At this point, he still regards her as a saviour. As soon as she begins to resist his advances, though, he changes his tune, snarling, "then why did you lead me up here?"(87) In his eyes, she has suddenly ceased to be a Madonna and has become a whore. Of course, there is absolutely no justification for this, since it was his idea that he should replace the slate in the first place — when the drop of water fell in middle of the dinner table, he said, "it looks as if your roof is in trouble. I'm very practical"(81). This frustrated, destructive side to Morgan explains the simplest of the play's mysteries, why he chooses Jean's kitchen for his suicide. He is taking his revenge on her. Earlier, he tells her, "you've been here. Where I am"(87), presumably referring to his private hell. When she protests that she has not, he replies, "*you will*"(87).

It is tempting to dismiss this unpleasant side of love as simply an indication of Morgan's madness. But most of the love scenes in the film involve violence of some form. In one flashback, Young Jean and Jim Mortimer are standing up against a wall in her bedroom, she with her legs up around him, when they hear her mother returning:

YOUNG JEAN: Jim, oh Lord, it's my mother.

JIM: What?

YOUNG JEAN: Let me down.

(*He looks at her, presses her harder against the wall, holding her there, with his hands pressed against the wall.*)

JIM: (*Quietly* ) I want to make love to you. (31)

The force is gentle, but it is still there. It need not even be physical, but simply a refusal to take her seriously, as in this example when he ignores her legitimate concerns:

YOUNG JEAN: Jim. Jim, it's hopeless.

JIM: What?

YOUNG JEAN: How can it work any more? Snatching time when my mum's out at cards, knowing we can't get married because of your parents.

JIM: We'll get married.

YOUNG JEAN: Eventually, yes. When you finally get back from Malaya. But it's so long. It makes everything seem pointless. Don't you think we should be sensible?

(*There's a pause.* JIM *throws back the cover, crosses the room and kneels in front of her. He opens the two sides of her dressing gown, lovingly. She is naked underneath. He looks into her eyes.*)

JIM: No. (52)[14]

This may seem a long way from Morgan's violence, but the attitudes to women which underlie them both are similar. In each case, the man assumes that it is all right for him to exert control of one form or another over women.

Yet another, almost incidental, illustration is the episode in which a group of policemen are looking at celebrity nudes in a magazine. The sight of "famous people without their clothes on"(41) strikes them as extremely funny. As the sole woman among them angrily points out, "men would be taking the joke much too far"(42). The humiliation involved in this kind of involuntary public display is a form of psychological violence which is directed almost exclusively at women. Pornography and romantic love may seem to be poles apart, but they both involve a totally unrealistic image of women, which denies their individuality and is indifferent to what they are really like. Morgan manages to ignore Jean's real personality by imposing on

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[14]. It is interesting that this scene comes straight after a discussion between Mike and Chrissie, in which he tries to persuade her to divorce her husband. Perhaps this emphasises the unrealistic nature of this relationship as well. After all, Mike does turn out to be a "sub-plot"(72) in Chrissie's life.

her a role which is completely inappropriate; he does not understand that she has a life independent of him. He is besotted not with her, but with a fantastic vision of his ideal woman, and so he can reject anything which seems to contradict that vision.

It is not only romantically inclined *men* who do violence to women, however. Jean, despite her realistic attitude to life, has also introjected the myth that women are healers, and so she feels guilty about his death. This guilt is shown by the juxtaposition at the end of the play of the shots of Morgan's suicide and Jim's throat being cut. In fact, this connection was made much earlier, before we had enough information to understand its significance. When Morgan kills himself, there is immediately a flashback to Jim and Jean making love inside an aeroplane. It is only later that we recognise Jean's sense of *déjà vu*. By placing these two deaths side by side like this, Hare obviously expects us to associate them for reasons other than their shared violence. This is important, because it is the only *causal* connection between the flashbacks to the fifties and the main action of the play. All the other connections have been purely *thematic*, but if the two time frames are not to appear as separate plays we would expect to be able to say at some stage that "this happened in the present because that happened in the past."

Jean has a suspicion that she could have prevented both deaths. She could have stopped Jim going to Malaya, and she could have "saved" Morgan as well. The fact that Jim wanted to go and any attempt to prevent him may have destroyed their relationship makes no difference, for her guilt is irrational. It is equally obvious that she is not responsible for Morgan's suicide, because she could only have helped him by destroying herself. How much blame should she shoulder for the madness of a stranger? This is what she has "fought for three weeks"(74).

This irrational guilt is related to Morgan's obsession with a mother-figure, and to romantic notions of love generally. While the particular form of *his* romanticism, with its extremes of violence and dependence, may be particular to Britain in the 1980s, Jean's self-imposed guilt is caused by a very old aspect of patriarchal ideology. Morgan would not have developed his desire for a woman who could kiss everything better if a social myth of this type had not already existed. Many women have to a greater or lesser extent accepted this myth, and therefore taken the weight of the world on their shoulders, carrying not only their own troubles but also those of others. When they cannot solve other people's problems, they feel guilty. The existence of men who want women to be like this promotes the existence of women who are like this, which in turn encourages future generations of men and women to adopt the same destructive mythology. The cycle can be broken, but only by recognising it as the ideological source of oppression that it is.

None of the characters does recognise this, however. They are nearly all involved in the search for a reason for Morgan's suicide; in particular, they want someone to blame. Randall, the police doctor, says that Mike Langdon looks "disappointed"(40) when he is told that Morgan committed suicide.[15] Roger Braithwaite also does his best to implicate Jean, by doing his "civic duty" and reporting her change of clothing to the police. Even Marcia, who is on Jean's side, innocently encourages her to accept the burden of guilt by asking, "did you offend him in some way?"(35)

Part of this interest in finding the guilty is a desire to prove one's own innocence. Marcia is relieved that Morgan did not shoot himself in *her* kitchen, because then she would have felt responsible:

> Does anybody know why he did it? And why on earth did he choose to come and do it to you? It was me he met first. I don't know why I didn't *think* at the dinner. I'd already met him. He could have done it to me. (35)

Even Jean, the most obvious "suspect," takes part in this game. It is interesting that instead of placing the blame squarely on the shoulders of society, or at the personal level on those of Morgan, she tries to transfer her guilt to another woman. First, she tries to persuade Mike Langdon that it was all Karen's fault:

> JEAN: It's a hard thing to say but I do see how Morgan became obsessed with her.
>
> LANGDON: Did he?
>
> JEAN: Oh, yes. Violently, I think. She's the kind of girl people do become obsessed with. (55)

Then she tries to force Karen to accept responsibility directly, because if she can do that she will be released from it herself:

> JEAN: I think you drove Morgan crazy.
>
> (KAREN *looks at her mistrustfully.*)
>
> KAREN: I don't know what you mean.
>
> JEAN: No, well, exactly. That's why.
>
> (KAREN *looks away.*)
>
> Goodness, I'm not saying *deliberately*, I don't mean you meant to . . . (64-65)

This, like Maggie's contempt for Laura's preservation of her sexual independence, illustrates how women are trained to participate in the power plays which keep them oppressed.

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[15]. The play does not seem to offer an adequate explanation of Mike's excessive interest, however, which goes way beyond a policeman's tendency to see crime in every nook and cranny.

Initially, Karen seems willing to accept her involvement, saying, "I think it was me he wanted to do it to. And just by bad luck he did it to you"(44). She changes her tune, however, when she realises what stakes they are playing for. Although Morgan possibly had more motive for wanting to take revenge on Karen than on Jean, she is quite right to reject Jean's accusations, because *neither* of them should feel guilty. But instead of pointing this out, Karen simply tries to parry Jean's thrust by returning the challenge:

> KAREN: Anyway, tell me, go on, tell me, since you're so clever, what did *you* do?
>
> JEAN: Karen . . .
>
> KAREN: If it wasn't an accident, I'd love to know what *you* did. (66-67)

The two women indulge in their own private battle over whose fault it was, when in fact neither of them had anything to do with it. Karen's refusal to take responsibility for Morgan's problem is the right thing to do, but she does it for the wrong reasons. It is not the result of any feminist consciousness, but of her entirely negative strategy of non-involvement.

## I V

As we would expect, Hare tries to extend his themes beyond the limits of Wetherby, to include society in general rather than just a few characters. The medium of film offers him techniques which are not available in the confines of a theatre. He is able to show the other people involved, even if only in the mass. The clearest example is Jean's farewell to Jim at the airport:

> *They begin to walk. We are above them. It is apparently deserted till we turn the corner. All over the rest of the airfield,* AIRMEN *are making their way with bags over their shoulders. Four great planes are waiting.* COMMANDING OFFICERS *with lists of where they're to go.* WIVES *standing waving at the side of the field. The* MEN *thicken into a crowd, going in one direction, till* JEAN *is the only woman among them.* (77)

They seem to be alone, but suddenly there is a whole crowd of people doing exactly the same as them. Hare's point is that Jim and Jean are not unusual; they are typical of a particular generation. He uses the same device at the very end of the film, when Jean and Stanley are talking in the pub:

> *They drink. We pull back. They are two among many. The low sound of conversation in the pub. They look around them. Fade.* (92)

There are a million stories in the naked city. This has been one of them. And the others are similar.

Even an image of a particular place can broaden the significance of the story, especially if it is a place associated with large numbers of people. The shots of the university start with Morgan, but then spread to include, by implication, the whole student population:

> *Flashback. The tower block at the University of Essex stands gaunt against the sky. More like a housing estate than a university. From one uncurtained window a light shines out.* MORGAN *sitting at his desk, twelve floors up in the air.*
>
> *Flashback. A gulch of tower blocks. They stand, lined up, sinister, desolated. Scraps of paper blow down between them. A scene more like urban desolation than a university. . . .*
>
> *Flashback. Glass on both sides, so we can see right through — A few lonely* STUDENTS *at the plastic tables.*
>
> *Flashback. An empty lift automatically opens its doors. Inside it is painted blue. Someone has scrawled, 'Fuck you All'.* (63-64)

With thousands of people gathered in the one place, the students are all still isolated from one another. Morgan's is just an extreme case of the alienation which is all around him. This does not just afflict the middle class, who can afford to go to university. As Mike and Chrissie drive Jean home after they meet in the Chinese restaurant, there is a brief glimpse of the working class environment as well:

> *The bleak industrial landscape of Leeds. As they draw up at the lights,* JEAN *turns and looks down the rows of abandoned terraced houses. In the middle of the road children have lit a bonfire, and are playing round it with sticks, and smashing bottles.* (55)

Perhaps the most striking example, however, is at the very end, when Langdon leaves his house after destroying his CID card:

> *We go high above the housing estate as* MIKE LANGDON *comes out of his front door in pullover and trousers and walks off down the road. A hundred little brick houses stretch away into the distance. The empty tarmac road glitters.* (91)

His home is no longer his sanctuary, as it was when Chrissie was there. Nor, presumably, do all the other little boxes, all made out of ticky-tacky, provide much comfort for their inhabitants.

Given this grim picture of modern Britain, the ending of the play is strangely ambivalent, because Mike's despair is offset by Jean's happiness. Even though she is deluded in her optimism, it may still be infectious. There is other evidence, too, that

Hare may have mellowed. The final line of the film, Stanley's toast, "to all our escapes"(92), is a persuasive plea for acceptance of what is admittedly a bad situation. In his earlier work, uncritical characters like Marcia were presented unsympathetically, but she is very likeable. This suggests that Hare has decided that as long as genuine solutions were available, as they seemed to be in the sixties and at least part of the seventies, then anyone who ignored them in favour of easy ways out was contemptible, but now that the prospects of immediate social change are poor, then perhaps people should simply cope as best they can.

Does this mean that his mind is turning to mush? Can people be politically aware and politically active, which must be his aim, while indulging in escapist fantasies, which by their very nature involve ignorance of the political and social climate? This dilemma is an old one; how far can a revolutionary social movement expect its members to sacrifice their own happiness for that of future generations? Several of Hare's earlier characters have faced this problem. Maggie and Arthur, for example, have ample opportunity to enjoy the freedom of the sixties, but instead opt to stand up for what they believe is right. Now, however, Hare seems to be suggesting that they would have been justified in choosing the first alternative. Does this indicate that he has succumbed to fatalism, or that he has sold out in his old age?

Fortunately, the answer is no. Here, as in all his plays, Hare points out that escapism is severely limited. The first piece of evidence that Jean and Stanley's position is flawed comes from Stanley himself:

> When you're a boy, you think, oh, it's so easy. Always wipe the slate and move on. Then you find, with the years, you become the prisoner of dreams. (91)

Escape is impossible, or at best only partly possible. In fact, the solutions can actually become the problem. This has also been an important theme of the history cycle; nostalgia, in particular, is a case of an attempted escape which actually aggravates the characters' disillusionment by making the present appear even worse than it is, in comparison with an imagined past. The second and strongest argument against escapism is offered by the despair of the young people. Given the concrete nature of the problems they face (unemployment and poverty), it is clear that social change is still the only *genuine* solution. So Hare's political beliefs have not altered, but he has become more understanding of the pressures which lead people to seek refuge in fantasy of one sort or another. This could well turn out to be a valuable development, because a less stridently moralistic playwright may be better able to communicate with his audience.[16]

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16. This may have changed, however, since his latest play, *The Secret Rapture*, is perhaps the angriest he has ever written.

## Chapter 9
## Genre-bender: The possibility of political theatre

Although Hare's plays contain a good deal of interesting historical and sociological analysis, much of what I have discussed in the earlier chapters is likely to pass unnoticed by the average audience. This is not only because theatre-goers do not have the opportunity to read and re-read the text, but because the naturalist genre, in which the plays *appear* to be written, displays an ideological favouritism which ensures that their political content cannot, or at least probably will not, be heard. This favouritism affects not just Hare but *all* political playwrights; it suggests that Brecht and Piscator were right when they argued that new dramatic forms were needed to encourage new political awareness.

I shall discuss three problems which afflict Hare's work. Two of these concern the tendency among members of the audience to distance themselves from what is happening on the stage, to imagine that what they are seeing, however compelling it may be, has nothing to do with their own lives. This distance occurs because people perceive the characters either as highly unusual individuals whose experience is completely removed from their own, or as social types whose emotions are too generalised to provide any useful insights into their own anxieties. The third difficulty, which may result as much from a flaw in Hare's personal vision as from a flaw in the naturalist genre, is the possibility that his plays may simply increase the frustration of his viewers, by showing them the horror of the existing state of affairs without offering them any hope for the future.

### I

The history plays, with the exception of *Brassneck* and *Knuckle*, are all examples of what is loosely called "realism." In popular usage, this means simply that the objects and characters we see on stage are fairly accurate representations of what we perceive as the real world. For example, Ibsen's plays give us a sense of what it would have been like to live in Scandinavia towards the end of last century, what people would have looked like and how they would have behaved. But while this vague use of the generic term tells us something about Hare's dramatic technique, it gives us little idea of his purpose.

Hare's plays can be more precisely identified as examples of *critical realism.* This is Georg Lukács's name for those works of literature which offer a "true picture" of the world; they allow the reader or audience to see behind the ideologically

prescribed surface of things and to discover the real social forces which are shaping their lives:

> The effect of art, the immersion of the receptant in the action of the work of art, his complete penetration into the special "world" of the work of art, results from the fact that the work by its very nature offers a truer, more complete, more vivid and more dynamic reflection of reality than the receptant otherwise possesses.[1]

In *Licking Hitler*, for example, Hare takes us behind Britain's façade of a free and equal nation to show us the "real" nature of the war effort, and the "real" war that was going on, not between the Allies and the Axis, but between the classes and the sexes.[2]

A work of critical realism need not be *superficially* realistic at all. Two of Lukács' heroes, Sir Walter Scott and Thomas Mann, are both far from realistic in the usual sense of the word. Instead, critical realism is *selective* realism, and includes only those details which contribute to this "dynamic reflection of reality." According to this definition, *Knuckle* could be included as an example of this form, despite its stylisation. (*Brassneck*, however, is probably still beyond the pale.) Lukács makes a strong distinction between critical realism on the one hand and naturalism and modernism on the other. The latter forms abandon this selective principle, and by trying to show everything, as Zola does, they end up by showing nothing of significance. Similarly, Hare's realism is quite different from the purely superficial naturalism which dominates the contemporary middle class theatre, exemplified by David Storey's *The Contractor*.

The main thing which distinguishes critical realism from lesser literary forms is its characterisation. Lukács's theory of character relies on the idea of "types":

> It is a key concept in Lukács' aesthetics for the determination of those elements (action, situation, character, etc.), which best mediate the individual (e.g., the historical "here and now") and the universal (e.g., the essential, although not in the metaphysical sense).[3]

On the one hand, characters must be individuals, or they will not be dramatically engaging. On the other hand, they must be typical, or they will not be politically interesting. It is important, though, to avoid going too far in either direction. A type "should become neither an abstraction (as in the Greek tragedies), nor an idealization (as in Schiller), nor an embodiment of 'the average' (as in Zola), but a dynamic,

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1. Georg Lukács, "Art and Objective Truth," in *Writer and Critic* (London: Merlin Press, 1970), p. 36; quoted in Pauline Johnson, *Marxist Aesthetics* (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 1984), p. 28.
2. Of course, Hare does not accept this simple notion of "objective reality," as we saw in Chapter 1. Lukács believes that critical realism is better than other literary forms because it is epistemologically more accurate; Hare prefers it because it is *morally* superior.
3. Béla Királyfalvi, *The Aesthetics of Györgi Lukács* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), p. 80.

dialectical synthesis of the major social, moral and intellectual-spiritual conflicts of an age."[4]

This seems to require an impossible conjuring trick. How can characters be representative of a whole section of society without becoming stereotypes? But this objection is based on a false dichotomy:

> Man is *zoon politikon*, a social animal. The Aristotelian dictum is applicable to all great realistic literature. Achilles and Werther, Oedipus and Tom Jones, Antigone and Anna Karenina: their individual existence -- their *Sein an sich*, in the Hegelian terminology; their 'ontological being', as a more fashionable terminology has it — cannot be distinguished from their social and historical environment. Their human significance, their specific individuality cannot be separated from the context in which they were created.[5]

Even our most personal fantasies and fears are widely shared, but because we do not discuss them we assume that they are ours alone.

Lukács argues that it is better to err on the side of the individual than on the side of the typical. According to him, exaggerated individuality will emphasise rather than hide the social nature of the characters' dilemmas:

> Only through the extreme intensification of typical situations can an author evoke from his characters the expression of the major contradictions of the time and exact the ultimate capacity for such expression latent in them.[6]

Presumably, Hare feels the same way, because he frequently uses this technique of giving an excessive example to illustrate a general malady. Unfortunately, both Hare and Lukács are mistaken, because they have moved from a purely *formal* analysis of a work of literature to an assumption about the effect which this form will have on those who perceive it.

The method of characterisation described above is part of Hare's "Authorial Ideology," which Terry Eagleton defines as "the author's specific mode of biographical insertion into GI [General Ideology], a mode of insertion over-determined by a series of distinct factors: social class, sex, nationality, religion, geographical

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4. George Bisztray, *Marxist Models of Literary Realism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), p. 81.

5. Georg Lukács, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism* (London: Merlin Press, 1962), p. 19. Hare is not alone in adopting this method of characterisation. Trevor Griffiths says, "I think my practice as a realist is probably Lukacsian. . . . it's that whole idea of a character working as a confluence of important social and political and moral forces within society, in real historical time." "Countering Consent: An Interview with John Wyver," in *Ah! Mischief: The Writer and Television* (London: Faber and Faber, 1982), p. 39.

6. Georg Lukács, "The Intellectual Physiognomy in Characterization," in *Writer and Critic*, p. 159.

region and so on."[7] In other words, Authorial Ideology consists of the author's conscious and unconscious beliefs. But these beliefs are only one determining factor on the text that is produced, and are not necessarily the dominant one. Eagleton lists the following factors as influencing the final product:

(i) General Mode of Production (GMP)
(ii) Literary Mode of Production (LMP)
(iii) General Ideology (GI)
(iv) Authorial Ideology (AuI)
(v) Aesthetic Ideology (AI)
(vi) Text[8]

In Hare's case, Authorial Ideology conflicts with Aesthetic Ideology, which is "the specific aesthetic region of GI."[9]

Within Aesthetic Ideology there are various smaller divisions, relating to the different types of artistic product. Obviously, the forces influencing jazz dance are not the same as those affecting architecture. Here is how Eagleton describes the literary division:

> This literary sub-sector is itself internally complex, constituted by a number of 'levels': theories of literature, critical practices, literary traditions, *genres*, conventions, devices and discourses.[10]

Drama really constitutes another sub-sector of Aesthetic Ideology, since there is a different mode of production for the performance of plays than for the publication of books. But Eagleton's account is good enough for our purposes, because genre belongs in both categories, and it is generic considerations above all which determine how a text is perceived, in the theatre as in the study.

Generic conventions are historically specific. *Tristram Shandy* would have been startling in the 1760s, because of the way it subverted expectations of linear narrative, but is quite acceptable now. A text can manipulate these expectations for certain effects, and many political writers have done just that. Edward Bond's *Restoration*, for example, ignores the tradition which requires that a comedy should have a happy ending; Bob's touching but utterly misplaced faith that his master will save him from being hanged for a murder which he did not commit makes the injustice of the class system especially shocking.

One of the most important conventions of the prevailing Aesthetic Ideology is the fact that we are trained to look at fictional characters as unique individuals, distinct from and often in opposition to their society. This is true of most literary styles which

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7. "Categories for a Materialist Criticism," p. 58.
8. "Categories for a Materialist Criticism," p. 44.
9. Eagleton, p. 60.
10. "Categories for a Materialist Criticism," p. 60.

have evolved under capitalism, from romanticism (for example, Byron's Don Juan) to naturalism (Flaubert's Madame Bovary) and modernism (Kafka's Josef K.). In fact, works which do stress the typical are often regarded as being of poorer quality, because of the widely held misapprehension that types can *only* be stereotypes and stock characters.

Of course, this is a clear example of Aesthetic Ideology being a direct reflection of General Ideology, because we view characters in literature just as we view ourselves and other people. The fact that our world seems to be peopled by individuals does not mean that this perception is an innate feature of human experience, because under feudal conditions "a person was identical with his rôle in society; he was a peasant, an artisan, a knight, and not *an individual* who *happened* to have this or that occupation."[11] As capitalism develops, however, "man discovers himself and others as individuals, as separate entities."[12]

Now we are in a position to see how Hare's political message is undermined by the conventions of "realism." There is a conflict within his plays between Authorial Ideology (critical realism) and Aesthetic Ideology (superficial realism, or naturalism). The former is submerged beneath the latter, so that it can be uncovered by critical analysis but is unlikely to be effective in performance. Hare has created characters who provide extreme examples of common social disorders. Because of the conventions of characterisation in the contemporary theatre, however, his audience will probably view them as individuals rather than types. In other words, because his plays are *superficially* realistic, like *The Contractor*, as well as *critically* realistic, they will be perceived as examples of naturalism. For example, Susan Traherne's unhappiness is likely to be seen as a personal neurosis rather than as her quite reasonable distress at the fact that the hopes of the war years have come to nothing. Since the accessibility of Hare's political message depends on the typicality of his characters, the subtle political and historical analysis present in the plays is likely to pass unnoticed.

Lukács and Hare underestimate the part which ideological conditioning plays in the perception of a work of literature. Although Hare acknowledges this "subjective" element, he fails to realise the full extent of the problem:

> The first lesson the playwright learns is that he is not going to be able to control an audience's reactions anyway; if he writes an eloquent play about the sufferings of the Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto there is always going to be someone in the audience who comes out completely satisfied with the evening, saying at last someone's had

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11. Fromm, p. 34.
12. Fromm, p. 38.

> the guts to say it, those Nazis knew what they were about.[13]

His example is of an extreme individual with a highly idiosyncratic interpretation of the play. He assumes that not everyone will be as wide of the mark as this hypothetical anti-Semite, and that most people will have some idea of what the playwright wants to say, even if they do not agree with it. But because he writes about the psychological effects of capitalism, as opposed to the political and economic effects, there is a good chance that he will be seen as just one more playwright obsessed with the mid-life crises of school-teachers and accountants.

## II

William Cofax is relieved when Caroline goes "mad," because her insanity frees him from the obligation to take her condemnation of society seriously. Once she has been admitted to hospital, she becomes a non-person, and her response to what she sees around her is "proved" to have been unsatisfactory. But if William can dismiss her in this way, then so can members of the audience. In fact, they can dismiss *any* of the characters in Hare's plays who criticise the *status quo*. All they have to do is to find some trait which makes the character different or disagreeable, and his or her opinions suddenly cease to have any relevance. This is another way in which members of the audience can avoid finding parallels between the lives of the characters and their own lives.

This may sound identical with the previous problem, in that Caroline and the other "mad" characters (Susan Traherne and John Morgan) are completely atypical, and very few people in the audience will have experienced such extreme alienation as they have. Paradoxically, however, their "madness" does not make them individuals but stereotypes; Caroline is no longer "Caroline," but a "mad-woman." This process is therefore the exact opposite of the previous one. Instead of being too *specific* to be representative of a particular section of society, the characters are seen as too *general.*

This stereotyping again arises from the false dichotomy between individuals and stereotypes which forms part of our General Ideology. If people cannot immediately identify with the characters as individuals, they make sense of them by designating them as types, so that they can ascribe to them stock motivation. This is apparent in Hare's comment on the reaction to *Plenty*:

> In England the opposition to *Plenty* forms around the feeling that from the start Susan Traherne contains the seeds of her own destruction, and that the texture of the society in which she happens

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13. "Lecture," p. 57.

> to live is nearly irrelevant, for she is bent on objecting to it, whatever its qualities.[14]

By emphasising Susan's idiosyncratic inability to get over the war, the audience can pity her while remaining detached. At the same time, however, she is seen as the type of person who is naturally perverse, a modern equivalent of Renaissance malcontents like Malevole and Vindice.

It may seem impossible for an audience to make both of these mistakes at the same time, because they appear to be mutually exclusive: on the one hand, it will see the characters as individuals rather than as types, while on the other, it will stereotype them and thus remove all the complexity of the action. In fact, these processes are related, because this is how prejudices function in real life. We often think we are ascribing individual motives to a particular person, when in fact we are ascribing to them stock motivation of a sort that has been bred into us. An example of this is the assumption among many Westerners that Gorbachev's *glasnost* is simply a subtle ploy to lull the West into a false sense of security, so that the Russians will be able to gain advantages in, for instance, military power. It is very difficult to produce evidence for such an assertion, and usually no attempt is made to do so. The response is based solely on fear and prejudice; the Soviet leader is automatically viewed in the same light as the communist bogey of the McCarthy era.

If this analysis is correct, then the gap between Hare's audience and his characters will be further increased, making what happens on stage appear even less relevant to the "real world" in the auditorium. Strong evidence that this does in fact occur is offered by two psychologists at the Amsterdam Institute of Theatre Research, who have conducted studies which indicate that there is a widespread tendency for members of an audience to side with one character in a play, and to disapprove of those with whom this character is in conflict. This occurs even when the playwright, director and actors are all trying to present a reasonably balanced account of a particular issue, in which none of the characters is entirely right, as Hare does in most of his plays. In other words, if playwrights "try to evoke critical reflection in their audience on complicated political issues . . . they run the risk of being completely misunderstood."[15]

Not surprisingly, "the spectators' attitude prior to the performance may determine who is seen as the 'good' and who as the 'bad guy'."[16] This is exactly what happened in the case of Raymond Brock; because many members of the audience

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14. "Introduction," p. 15.
15. Ed Tan and Henry Shoenmakers, "'Good guy bad guy' Effects in Political Theatre," in *Semiotics of Drama and Theatre*, ed. Herta Scmid and Aloysius van Kesteren, (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1984), p. 467.
16. Tan and Shoenmakers, p. 499.

had sold out in the same way that Brock had, they were bound to be prejudiced in his favour. Hare has again failed to take account of the audience's likely reactions, assuming that each member of the audience will bring only those preconceptions which are required for perceiving what Hare wants them to perceive. Again, this constitutes a clash between his Authorial Ideology and the prevailing Aesthetic Ideology (which in this case, as in the previous one, is a direct reflection of General Ideology). The myth of the "ideal reader" plays an important part in most of our literary activity.

What, if anything, can Hare do about this? Tan and Shoenmakers conclude that the only solution is that "producers can try to stereotype characters stronger [*sic*] than their audience will do, and in the opposite direction, for . . . if you do not stereotype your characters, your audience will readily do it for you."[17] This stereotyping, of course, is completely at odds with critical realism, so if Hare were to adopt it he would have to sacrifice much of his sociological analysis. As we saw in Chapter 5, he rejected two-dimensional characterisation precisely because it did not allow him either to portray the complexities of ideology or to represent his middle class characters as victims of that ideology.

## III

These first two factors increase the distance between the audience and the action on stage, thereby reducing the political impact of the plays. Michelene Wandor introduces a further problem, which is that even if audiences do understand what Hare is trying to achieve, they are unlikely to use that knowledge, instead remaining entirely passive. Although Wandor is talking solely about Hare's depiction of women, her complaint can be extended to his treatment of men as well:

> For David Hare women are essentially innocent bystanders to the main events of history, powerless to influence them, and rarely responsible individuals. Inevitably they must fail if they try to be independent and survive in a man's world, or they will become ciphers (as romantic victims) of a view of male despair.[18]

Implicit in this statement is a perfectly justifiable call for playwrights to portray strong women on stage.

As a criticism solely of Hare's treatment of women, this will not stand up. Hare's point is that *everyone* is a victim of history; his male characters are not free agents either, despite their positions of apparent authority. Wandor's objection goes much deeper than this, however, and undermines Hare's whole political programme. The problem is this. One of his objectives is to challenge the belief in the immutability

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17. Tan and Shoenmakers, p. 501.
18. Wandor, *Understudies*, p. 83.

of contemporary society. He shows that change is possible by showing the change which has occurred. But there is no sense in his plays that this change is the result of conscious human action; it seems to be caused by forces beyond the control of the characters, both men and women. This is because he has to show his characters as "victims of history" in order to persuade his middle class viewers that they are suffering under the capitalist-patriarchal system, and that they would benefit from radical social change. While he shows the *need* for change, he does not show that change happens because people go out and *make it happen.* This is the point of Wandor's criticism — there are no positive role models. After seeing a Hare play, the audience could leave the theatre thinking that social change is both possible and desirable, but without feeling motivated to take concrete political action for themselves.

This is obviously another version of the tension between the simultaneous representation of change and lack of change which Hare encountered as early as *Brassneck.* As we saw in Chapter 5, he moved away from satire and towards realism in his later work as a means of avoiding this tension, but he does not seem to have succeeded. The reason for his failure may lie with the genre itself, as was the case with the two previous problems. In "A Short Organum for the Theatre" Brecht writes, "the theatre as we know it shows the structure of society (represented on the stage) as incapable of being influenced by society (in the auditorium)."[19] Realism seems better suited to showing the problems of an existing society than to showing how they may be solved, since the latter always contains a non-realistic element. Simply showing existing problems is more likely to make people depressed than to infect them with enthusiasm for change. This passivity is reinforced by the dominant Dramatic Mode of Production, which requires an audience to sit quietly and watch a play, a film or a television programme, without getting directly involved in any way.

Although Brecht found it necessary to dispense with realism, it may still be possible to use it constructively. In the seventies and eighties, women still face resistance in their struggle for equality, and realistic political theatre must reflect this. But there is no shortage of impressive women in society to act as role models on the stage — Wandor herself is one example, as a feminist poet, playwright, literary critic and editor. And several dramatists have written inspiring, realistic plays about people involved in the fight for socialism: Trevor Griffiths, for instance, shows Tom Mann and the 1911 Liverpool seamen's strike in *Such Impossibilities* (1971), and Antonio Gramsci and the Turin factory councils in *Occupations* (1970). These characters may not succeed in their aims (it would be unrealistic if they did, since there has never been a successful socialist revolution in the West), but they get close enough to their goals to show that they *are* attainable. Such plays describe the oppressive nature of society,

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19. *Brecht on Theatre*, p. 189.

to demonstrate that change is necessary. At the same time, they manage to avoid fatalism by showing that although the reactionary forces were triumphant *this time,* the victory was far from certain. This leaves open the possibility that next time the spoils will be ours. So perhaps the lack of positive figures in Hare's plays *does* indicate a gap in his vision, a subconscious despair which is at odds with his stated activism.

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